

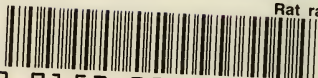


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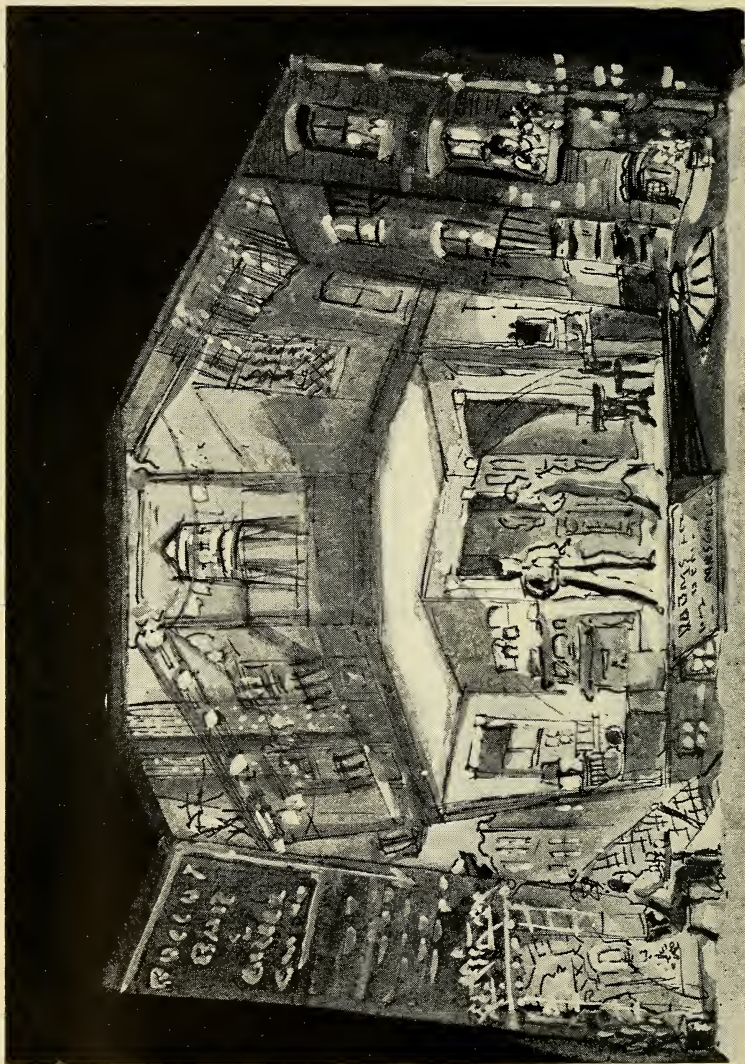
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DRAWING BY FREDERICK STOVER

THE RAT RACE

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

by

GARSON KANIN

DRAMATISTS PLAY SERVICE, INC.

NEW YORK

812.5
K132
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TO NANCY AND LELAND

THE RAT RACE was presented by Leland Hayward at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre, New York City, on December 22, 1949. It was staged by the author. Donald Oenslager designed the setting, and Miss Field wore clothes designed by Lucinda Ballard.

The cast was as follows:

HELEN BROWN	BETTY FIELD
GUS HAMMER	BARRY NELSON
SODA	DORO MERANDE
MAC	JOSEPH SWEENEY
ARTIE BRAY	REX WILLIAMS
THE TELEPHONE MAN	RAY WALSTON
BO KERRY	PAT HARRINGTON
EDIE KERRY	DENNIE MOORE
FRANKIE JAY	JOE BUSHKIN
CARL	GEORGIE AULD
TIP	SHERMAN KANE
CARL'S GIRL	TONI TUCCI
ARTIE'S MAN	LOU OLES
RALPH	HAL GREEN
POLICE DEPARTMENT	DAVID EDELMAN
POLICEMAN	PAUL SHIERS
THE WAITER	JOSEPH E. BERNARD
THE NEIGHBORS	JOHNNY DALE, BELLE FLOWER

William Hammerstein was production associate.

The arrangements and original music were by Joe Bushkin.

The music was played by

TRUMPET	<i>Lou Oles</i>	CLARINET AND	
TENOR SAX	<i>Georgie Auld</i>	FLUTE	<i>Sherman Kane</i>
PIANOS	<i>Joe Bushkin and</i>	VIOLIN AND	
	<i>Hal Green</i>	BASSOON	<i>David Edelman</i>
		DRUMS	<i>Pat Harrington</i>

David M. Pardoll was the production stage manager and Paul Shiers was the stage manager. Joseph Fretwell III supervised all the costumes other than Miss Field's.

TIME: The Present.

PLACE: New York City.

ACT ONE

The curtain rises.

West 47th Street, near Ninth Avenue, seen from an odd vantage point.

To the left, we seem to be looking down at the summer garden back of a corner bar. Above it, various parts of signs can be seen. They read: "BAR" AND "GRILL." "ROCCO'S. AIR-COOLED. AIR-CONDITIONED. COOLER INSIDE." And the inevitable neon "TELEVISION." A spare, elderly man sits at a little table. He is Roy McGreevy, known as MAC. On the table is a pile of books and three beer glasses. Two are empty, the third almost.

To the right we look up at a roof with skylight and a series of windows which look onto it. Framed by her window, Mrs. Luigi Gallo, called "SODA" because she is forever drinking it, sits and surveys the world.

Center, we look straight at the two upper stories, and roof of SODA's rooming house at 425 West 47th Street. Under the lower windows part of the following legend is legible: "TO LET: REHEARSAL STUDIOS BY HR., WK., OR MO.—FURNISHED ROOMS BY DAY OR WK.—APARTMENTS (HSKIPING) 1-1/2, 2-1/2, 3-1/2. APPLY SUPT. WITHIN. MRS. L. GALLO."

Beyond can be seen the more impressive buildings of the city and the trammeled roofs and streets which lie between. Aerials

(one with a captured kite), wash-lines, pigeon hutches and a water tower.

Further still is the sky which holds, from time to time, the full spectrum of color.

Milk wagons, taxis, musicians, children and peddlers take their places in the synchronized sounds of the passing day. MAC looks out at the audience.

MAC. Three beers and right away I start talking. That's me. Whoever happens to be standing handy—or sitting handy, I don't care. One thing I'm not is particular. McGreevy's the name. Did I mention that? Roy McGreevy? Occupation, nothing. *Now*, that is. Worked fairly regular just over fifty years. I been a sign painter by trade, mostly. I done more gold leaf—you no doubt seen my work a thousand times. We used to say around the shop, "You got to have a steady hand and a steady job!" Now I'm Social Security. So, in a way, you support me. Thanks. *(He sips his beer)* I been sittin' here an hour worryin' what's the matter with me. Now, I've decided, hell—there's something the matter with everybody! *(Another sip)* For instance. Over here across the street where I live there's a girl got a room two above me. Helen. Tell you her trouble. Livin' in the past.

(Lights come up gradually inside the center building, and through the walls and wiring and plumbing we begin to see Helen's room. It is small and oddly shaped. With the ingenuity of the impoverished, it has been made comfortable. Two screens, strategically placed, partition one corner, and a curtain has been hung around a small washstand. The screened sections are not completely hidden from view. There is an upright piano in the room, locked and unused. And old.

In the rear wall, a small arch leads to sleeping quarters. Only by stretching language out of shape can this place be called a bedroom. It is not a room at all. It holds a bed, a small dresser, a chair, and no more. The bed, brass, can be seen crowding three walls. The room is uninhabited. Somewhere, within hearing, a trumpet player is doping a chorus of "You Go To My Head" in emulation of the late Bunny Berigan. He goes on with this throughout the scene.

Across the street, a trap drummer who was born without a sense of rhythm is attempting to acquire one. Directly below, an arranger is working at his piano, pumping gaiety into a sad little tune.

HELEN comes into the room from the alcove. All who attempt to guess her age guess wrongly. She is barefooted. She wears a skirt, but no blouse as yet, only a brassiere. Her hair is piled top of her head. She is smoking.

Over the curtain rod at the sink, a Turkish towel holds two pairs of silk stockings, drying. HELEN comes down, feels them, selects the dryer pair, and sits down to put them on.

SODA now starts up with the audience by leaning out of her window another notch, holding up her pop bottle and inquiring)

SODA. You know why they call this kind "cream soda"? I don't. It ain't cream after all. (*She sucks her straw*)

MAC. That Helen! I don't know how old she is but she can't be very. I would say about twenty-six, but then Helen herself says she's twenty-six so I figure she's about thirty-one. (*Back to his beer*)

SODA. She's forty, that's a fact. Forty and a half, in fact. I know

it for a fact. (*She finishes the bottle, noisily, and drops the straw out of the window. Now she puts the bottle on the floor beside her and comes up with another. This one contains a flame-colored liquid*) Not real orange—it's chemical—but I tell you the way they're making chemicals today I'd rather drink it than the regular squeezed. (*She goes to work on the new supply with automatic relish. HELEN takes a last puff of her cigarette and gets a waist out of a drawer*)

MAC. I talk to her sometimes, but I can't help her—nobody can but herself, and she won't. Given up, she has. But just about the appealinglest girl I ever met.

SODA. She's a bum. A female bum. She thinks she's foolin' everybody she's foolin' nobody. Butterflyin' around. There's only one thing worse than a pro and that's a semi-pro, should you ask me. (*HELEN moves nearer to the window of her room for better light to assist her in unsnapping the small snappers of her waist. We hear a whistle—loud and shrill—the wolf-call. She leaps away from the window, stands back against the wall for a moment in flushed anger, then comes back and shouts across the court*)

HELEN. If you got nothin' better to do, you nosey Goddam half-wit!! (*She pulls down the shade like an exclamation point. The walls of her room fly away and admit us to view. She gets into her waist, and is on her way out of the room when she is interrupted by a knock*) Yeah?

A VOICE. Telephone.

HELEN. What?

VOICE. Telephone company.

HELEN. Yeah, what about?

VOICE. Mrs. Helen Brown?

HELEN. What if?

VOICE. Bryant 9-8040?

HELEN. Go ahead.

VOICE. I have to make a mechanical adjustment, please. (HELEN *thinks a moment, decides*)

HELEN. You'll have to come back. I'm busy right now.

VOICE. Listen! Lady! (He *knocks again, then continues, louder*)
Can I talk to you one minute? Very important?

HELEN. I'm busy.

VOICE. (*With real emotion*) Please, lady! (HELEN *hesitates, then goes to work on the door. It is not a small effort, because this door has six locks on it. There is the usual one under the knob. Also, a door bolt; above that, a cross bolt. Above the knob, a Yale lock, then a door chain. And near the top another heavy patent lock. Each one makes its own noise. The operation takes some time. When she has done unlocking, she pats her hair, and moistens her lips, automatically. She opens the door. An average man walks in, carrying a tool kit*)

TELEPHONE MAN. (*Looking at the locks*) What's this? Fort Knox?

HELEN. (*Closing the door*) Very important, you said.

TELEPHONE MAN. That's right.

HELEN. For you or for me?

TELEPHONE MAN. I like you to give me a break.

HELEN. Why? Like what?

TELEPHONE MAN. Well, look. Is it my fault I got to remove your phone? (*He hands her a blue slip*) I got nothin' to do with it. I just work for a livin'.

HELEN. What do you think *I* do? Fat of the land?

TELEPHONE MAN. Everybody has the same reaction. Come back, they say, come back later like some miracle is gonna happen if they stall. (*An awkward pause. MAC finishes his beer and leaves, unobtrusively*) There's no miracles, Mrs. Brown. Not so far anyhow. A bill ain't paid eighteen days—remove instrument. You'd be surprised how many go. It used to be we used to discontinue service first awhile, *then* remove. (*Another pause*) But a lot of people got sore with a dead instrument so they used to smash 'em up. You know people, how they are. So now we yank 'em right away. (*HELEN is in a panic, trying not to show it*)

HELEN. I'd appreciate you could only come back later.

TELEPHONE MAN. Look. I'm supervised, y' know, same as anybody else. I got to make my showing. Everybody gives me this come-back-later routine how long y' think I'm gonna last? Bad enough how many just ain't home let alone the come-back-laters. (*He looks around for the phone*)

HELEN. How about you giving *me* a break?

TELEPHONE MAN. Nothin' *I* can do, lady.

HELEN. Sure there is. (*His expert eye has caught the bellbox, followed the cord to a crinoline skirted doll on the table. He peeps under it and sees his phone*)

TELEPHONE MAN. (*In surprised delight*) Say, I didn't know they still had these. I haven't seen one in—

HELEN. How about it?

TELEPHONE MAN. It's not me. (*He kneels down and opens his tool kit. HELEN moves to him*)

HELEN. (*In one spill*) Do me a favor, will you, don't cut my heart out? (*He is working on the mechanism with swift efficiency*) My whole living depends. I got to have a phone if not I'm done. I'm gonna pay it—it *takes* a minute.

TELEPHONE MAN. What's your line— (*He waits a beat*) sister? (*His manner changes. He is suddenly predatory*)

HELEN. (*Urging softly*) Modelling. I do modelling. (*A pause*) Different kinds. I work dancing a few shifts over at Tango Gardens. But I'm tryin' to break into the modelling game. That's why I mean about my phone.

TELEPHONE MAN. Oh.

HELEN. Come on.

TELEPHONE MAN. (*As he goes back to work*) What?

HELEN. Make a mistake. (*He bends toward phone*) Make two mistakes. (*His head snaps back*) In fact.

TELEPHONE MAN. (*Stopping*) I don't know.

HELEN. (*With effortful magnetism*) Sure you do. What do we care for the telephone company? They're on the wealthy side, wouldn't you say?

TELEPHONE MAN. It's not so easy.

HELEN. Figure something. Press a button. Lose a card. Stretch me a couple weeks. You won't be sorry. (*He gets up and lights a cigarette. He looks at her. She is saying it all without words*)

TELEPHONE MAN. I don't think— (*He pauses*)

HELEN. That's right. Don't think. (*They exchange a little laugh. TELEPHONE MAN looks at the card in his hand*)

TELEPHONE MAN. (*Musing*) Bryant 9-8040.

HELEN. (*Softly*) That's right. And how you gonna use it if you take it out, you big clown? (*TELEPHONE MAN, laughing, gives his head one great rueful shake and kneels to his work again. He undoes what we have just seen him do*)

TELEPHONE MAN. (*After a while*) Join the Navy and see the world. Join the New York Telephone they shoulda said . . . I'll do what I can for you, honey.

HELEN. Thanks.

TELEPHONE MAN. Don't worry about it. . . . Still and all—I may give you a call at that—in case I ever need any modelling. (*He is preparing to leave*) This branch manager we've got—tall fella with an Oldsmobile convertible—if you had a friend—maybe the four of us two couples sometime?

HELEN. Let's talk it over.

TELEPHONE MAN. Bryant 9-8040. (*He jots it into his little book*) He's got the convertible but I've got the appeal—you know what I mean? (*He puts his fist against her jaw, gives it a playful mock punch, and goes. HELEN locks all six locks. As she gets to the last one the door is assaulted*)

HELEN. Who is it?

SODA'S VOICE. I want a word with you, young lady.

HELEN. I'll give you a word—knock off.

SODA'S VOICE. —use that tone to me you little bum you!

HELEN. Go take a bath. You need it! (*The door is being pounded*)

SODA'S VOICE. I'm gonna stay here the whole day—I mean it!

HELEN. You want to catch smallpox? I got smallpox.

SODA. You open up! You hear me? (*Bang*) Hear me? (*Slap*) Hear me? (*Kick*)

HELEN. (*In a fury of exasperation*) All right! (*She takes it out on the locks and flings open the door. SODA comes into the room, turns to face HELEN*)

SODA. (*Very quietly*) Close the door, kindly.

HELEN. (*Softly*) Why don't you simply live and let live?

SODA. Why don't you play the game fair and square? Why don't you be honest?

HELEN. Because I can't afford it. That's for the luxury trade, honest.

SODA. You can afford to pay a private telephone you can afford me a increase.

HELEN. I'm broke, can you understand English?

SODA. So with what did you pay the phone? With broke?

HELEN. I didn't. With nothing.

SODA. If you want to razzle dazzle *me* you got to get up pretty early in the morning only earlier than *you* get up in it young lady.

HELEN. Who wants to?

SODA. He came to take it out the fellow—

HELEN. So?

SODA. So he didn't. Nothing gets by me, girly, at least not much. Maybe I got no college diplomas hanging on my walls but I been around.

HELEN. Not only around but in and out, too, you snoopy old bag!

SODA. You can't insult me. I take it from whence it comes and charge it up to ignorance. I'm giving you a notice from my counselor—the rate starting tomorrow A.M. is two dollars and twenty cents daily.

HELEN. Two-twenty! You know how many tickets I have to dance to make two-twenty? (*SODA holds out a folded document. HELEN throws her hands behind her back in an instinctive fear of touching it and making it legal. SODA, pouncing upon this fear, slaps the document down on a table*)

SODA. It's really a room for two people that's the story.

HELEN. Two pigs I guess you must mean because who else would want to?

SODA. Ha, ha! You admit it, you're a pig.

HELEN. I sure in hell do.

SODA. So then get out. It so happens I don't cater to no pigs. If you want to pay the rise okay if not you got to get.

HELEN. Neither one.

SODA. I know what to do.

HELEN. Sure. You know to pester me pester me pester—listen give it up. You make no impression. I been pestered every day

of my life one way or the other so I've got a skin like an alligator if you want to feel it.

SODA. (*As she goes*) No, thank you. (*As she crosses the threshold, HELEN kicks the door after her with violence. There is a startled scream from offstage as the door slams, close behind her. HELEN bolts it.*)

SODA'S VOICE. (*Screaming*) I'll report you! I'll report you to the telephone company. (*She slaps the door hard—one! two! three! four! five! six! seven! in swift final desperation and then kicks it three times, slowly, to punctuate the punctuation. The ensuing silence falls restfully on our ears. A moment passes. HELEN comes back into the room and goes to the phone. She dials. From the street, the amplified tinkle of a Good Humor ice-cream wagon fills the air. It stops, apparently close by. Its sound might suggest the Pearly Gates were it not for the prosaic shouts of the vendor*)

HELEN. (*On the phone*) Hello, Avis. . . . This is Peggy. . . . Peggy! Get the wax out! . . . Anything doing? . . . I know. I hear the same all over. . . . Still and all I appreciate you could give me a call, Avis. . . . I'm in bad. . . . No, but I've got a damn landlady in my hair. . . . Not behind, no, but she wants to raise me. . . . Oh, sure that's a great idea, thanks for nothing—move where to? . . . Everything seems to be hitting me all at once all of a sudden. . . . Okay, Avis. . . . Try. (*She hangs up, dials again. The sounds of the neighbor musicians fill the room. On the phone again*) Hello, Mildred. This is Joanie. . . . Listen, I've got some trouble. You think you might be able to give me a call? . . . I been counting on you. . . . I'm short of connections as hell. . . . She did? I thought she only—(*A knock*) I have to go, Mildred. I think it's my trouble.

(*Through the door*) Who is it? . . . (*Into the phone*) Call you back. (*She hangs up*)

MAC'S VOICE. Mr. McGreevy, Mrs. Brown. (HELEN *laughs in relief*)

HELEN. (*Opening the door*) Oh! (MAC *comes in, eating a Popsicle and carrying another*) I'm sorry, Mr. McGreevy.

MAC. (*He hands her a Popsicle*) With my compliments. (*She takes it*)

HELEN. Thank you. (*She raises her Popsicle to him in a toast. He responds. She takes a bite*) You want to sit a minute, Mr. McGreevy?

MAC. I don't mind. (*He sits. She does, too*)

HELEN. That all right, that chair?

MAC. Thank you. Mrs. Brown—

HELEN. Yes?

MAC. Have you got any particular topic of conversation in mind?

HELEN. No.

MAC. All right if I introduce one?

HELEN. Of course, why not?

MAC. Well, Mrs. Brown, my topic is *Mr. Brown*.

HELEN. Go ahead.

MAC. I don't want you to feel that I feel that a Popsicle gives me rights. But this interests me.

HELEN. Yeah.

MAC. *Is there a Mr. Brown?*

HELEN. Yes.

MAC. Thank you.

HELEN. Where, I couldn't tell you. I haven't seen him since November the eighth, 1947. I got up and looked in the lower berth and he was gone, that's all. All this was on a train. The Twentieth Century, in fact.

MAC. Think of that.

HELEN. I didn't know if to bust out laughing or crying so I did both.

MAC. Has there been a divorce?

HELEN. I guess so. I don't know. I signed plenty of papers, I know. With notary publics and all that.

MAC. But is that right to call yourself still Mrs. Brown? I don't know the law—it's just a point of information.

HELEN. I wouldn't care, law or not. All I know, it saves me a lot of trouble. Misses get their shoulder straps torn much more than Mrs.'s.

MAC. Of course.

HELEN. So that's why. (*They eat their Popsicles in silence for a moment. There is this difference: MAC takes some interest in his—relishing it, savoring it, appreciating it, looking at it now and again. HELEN, on the other hand, nibbles automatically, her mind on other things*)

MAC. What was the screaming? Incidentally?

HELEN. Same old.

MAC. You know what I would do if I was you? Move.

HELEN. And what would you do if you were you?

MAC. I'm talking for your own good.

HELEN. Where do I go? I tried Tampa—two years ago already. God! I took a couple drinks one night my father started cuffin' me around. Took me a year and a half to make up my mind to go back there—took me five minutes to decide to get out again.

MAC. Bad news.

HELEN. I don't fit in there.

MAC. No.

HELEN. I don't fit in here, neither, but at least here not so many notices it. You don't know a small town.

MAC. I'm from New York City—smallest town there is, if you want the truth and that's a fact.

HELEN. It was nice, though, Tampa, in the olden times, while they lasted. Like every Saturday night, the Blue Mill. Dancing and all that. Contests, sometimes. We hardly ever didn't win something, Steve and me. That's how he got the idea regarding the Harvest Moon Ball, you know, the dancing contest. Honest, when we started out in the Madison Square Garden I couldn't hardly believe it. It was mostly Steve, the way he promoted. And don't think I didn't enjoy it because I did enjoy it—only of course I never had any confidence. The first night down there—that was the first time he started getting sore at me down there. He started hollering you got to have confidence—that's half of the battle. Confidence. So I tried—but I don't know. He was much more disappointed than me, in the end of it.

MAC. I'd have voted for you, Helen.

HELEN. Thanks. (*He finishes his Popsicle, looks at the stick*)

MAC. They're making 'em better all the time, don't you think that? (*He drops the stick into a wastebasket pasted with magazine covers*)

HELEN. (*Absently*) What? (*She looks down at the stick in her hand*)

MAC. You'd of enjoyed it if you'd of known you were having it.

HELEN. Yeah.

MAC. If I was a doctor I would send you to the Polyclinic and have your head twisted back in shape from backwards to frontwards.

HELEN. (*She drops her stick into the wastepaper basket*) It's like smoking. The doctor says to me, cut down on your smoking. I said to him—how can I—? I don't ever know when I'm doing it! (*MAC rises*)

MAC. Mrs. Brown, I invite you down to Rocco's for a beer. Or a Pink Lady. Champagne cocktail, domestic. Anything your heart desires up to sixty cents.

HELEN. No, thank you.

MAC. Come on.

HELEN. It's about dinner time.

MAC. That's what I say. Couple of drinks. Worst thing anybody can do is eat on an empty stomach.

HELEN. No, thanks, just the same.

MAC. I was hoping to continue this important conference.

HELEN. What about?

MAC. About your future.

HELEN. I've had my future, thanks.

MAC. You got one of the two worst diseases there is. Living in the past.

HELEN. Yeah? What's the other one?

MAC. —in the future.

HELEN. Must be nice to know it all.

MAC. Nowhere near. Seventy-six years I been trying to learn how to live. That's a gyp, ain't it?

HELEN. Sure is.

MAC. Come on down.

HELEN. No.

MAC. So we won't talk. We'll have a soft drink and put a quarter in the machine. (HELEN *shakes her head*) You don't seem to realize it plays six records for a quarter. Or the same one six times. That's what I usually do—I got one I been patronizing all this week. "La Vie En Rose." A French song they claim it is. A girl singing full of heart and very refreshing. This hour it's quiet around Rocco's. Also, a friendly atmosphere. People got to get out of their four walls every once and a while. Face it. You got to rub up against other people. Even around farms and in the rural areas—once and a while, they meet in a village or a meeting house or a church. It's necessary.

HELEN. I tell you the truth. I'm waiting a call.

MAC. Okay. I don't believe it, but okay. I better get down there myself, though. (*He starts out*) If I stay away too long they think I been run over. (*He goes. She watches him do so, then stands perfectly still for what seems a long time. Now she turns from the door, lights a cigarette, and stands looking out of the window, a lonely figure. From the street comes the familiar cry "I cashclothes! I cashclothes! I cashclothes!" The lights fade and the walls enclose HELEN's room. Simultaneously, lights come up on SODA's window. There she sits, surveying the passing world and sipping her soda*)

SODA. I says to her, after all, you got to abide by the law the same as everybody. So she opens up her big mouth to me and she says I don't care for you *or* the law, she says. I mean what can you do with a person of such kind of character? She's just a cheap thing. Very big for her boots, what's more. (*She sips*) Imagine the nerve of her to open up her big mouth to me, that little bum up there! (*She tosses her head, indicating the location of HELEN's room*) One thing I know for a fact—she's not long for this place. If she wouldn't pay attention to the lawyer letter—I am not joking—I take an oath I'll report her—if not to the New York Telephone then to the Forty-Seventh Street Station House. I could have reported her already long ago, only it's like this. In the first place—I don't want to make her or nobody any trouble. There are people by nature mean-spirited. I'm *not* by nature mean-spirited. *In* the second place—it would go in the paper with the address and all the rest of it and right away you got a bad name and all the rest of it. And in the *second* place, who wants them snooping around—what's it their business? I mean what my tenants do in their apartments is their own damn business. Excuse me. (*She sips away, contentedly. The lights warm on MAC at the opposite side of the stage. He looks out at us sadly*)

MAC. I'm a damn fool.

SODA. Another fellow. On the second floor in the back? Some kind of music writer. What do I care? Let him.

MAC. What would you do if you were you, she says? Well I better admit she had me there. In seventy-six years of living—the things I've learned—you wouldn't believe it—I don't believe it myself. And with all that—I still don't know how to live. I can run a typewriter—one time in Connecticut—I built myself a house. I speak a little Portuguese—"Ola, amigos, como vao? Como veem, falo um pouco de Portugues. Nao muito bem, mas o suficiente!" I don't know why—one time I wanted to better myself. But with all the things—the main thing I'm still trying to learn. How to live. How in the hell to live in the world. What to do with the hours you got. Wake up and there you are. Benjamin Franklin, now there was a man. I remove my hat in his memory. (*He does so*) Used to wake up and spend the first hour of his day figuring out how to use the rest of it. It worked fine. He accomplished. Made the most of. Enjoyed. Not like most of the rest of us.

SODA. And the way she sucks up to that old fool that McGreevy. When she didn't live here yet, he used to be a plain quiet old man. And if she didn't hear about his insurance policy believe me she would never started in. Who told her God knows—but from that minute she started putting on double perfumery and like an old fool—he sniffs. And who knows what else? Hot pants—that's bad enough—but *old* hot pants—is disgusting is the only word for it. (*Offstage a loud bell*) Excuse me, it's my ringing. (*She leaves the window*)

MAC. A story sprung up around the neighborhood here about that I own a one hundred thousand dollar life insurance pol-

icy. How it sprung up, that I don't know. Of course, one time I did go and swipe a piece of stationery from the Prudential people—and I typewrote up a letter to myself saying that on such and such a date a premium would be due on my one hundred thousand dollar life insurance policy and I put on a three-cent stamp and I mailed it to myself and I didn't lick the envelope very wet so when it come it come loose. Maybe *this* is how the story sprung up—I don't know. Possibly. (*He leaves as the lights on him fade. Simultaneously, the walls disappear and the lights come on in HELEN's room. It is unoccupied. A sound of a key in the lock brings HELEN into the room from the alcove just as SODA kicks open the door and bounds into the room*)

HELEN. (*Startled*) What the hell—?

SODA. Very well, young lady, I take possession.

HELEN. Good thing I had on six locks while I lived here.

SODA. (*Out to the hall*) Come on, come on! (*A young man comes in, slowly, feeling strange. Whatever he looks like underneath will have to await discovery. Just now he is covered with the patina of a summer mover's grime and fatigue. He wears a straw hat, a crumpled seersucker, a bow tie, and carries two bags, one oddly shaped. His name is GUS HAMMER*) This is it. Okay?

GUS. Well—

SODA. And your friend is just down one.

GUS. Yuh.

SODA. Only this is a much valuabler room. (*GUS looks at it, and at HELEN standing there*) You got to excuse the appearance at present. At present a slob has been living in it (*HELEN goes*

back into the alcove) The use of the piano is seventy-five cents a week extra. You want it? Very reasonable.

GUS. I guess I better, yuh. (*SODA gets out a large and loaded key ring, and selects one, and opens the locked piano*)

SODA. Just tuned. Last November. (*She sits down and plays six bars of "Narcissus" faultlessly, with the lightest possible touch. Now she rises, goes to him and holds out her hand. He gets the idea a beat late, then pays her. HELEN comes in. He puts down one bag and takes off his hat. The moment is awkward, but not for SODA. She looks at GUS, points to HELEN*) She's moving out. (*She looks at HELEN, points to GUS*) He's moving in. (*To them both*) That's all. Arrange it among you. (*She whirls her hands in illustration*)

HELEN. Two people you said.

SODA. (*Caught*) What?

HELEN. He your idea of two people?

SODA. (*Improvising*) Another one's coming. A friend.

GUS. (*Confused*) What?

SODA. (*Mysteriously*) You know.

GUS. Not about any—

SODA. (*Ending the discussion*) Never mind! (*She leaves without closing the door. HELEN drags a trunk in from the alcove and begins to pack. From above, the sound of a racking, hacking cough. GUS looks up through the ceiling. The cough continues, then stops, spent*)

GUS. (*Ill-at-ease*) Some woman!

HELEN. Who? (*GUS indicates SODA. HELEN looks at him, sees*

nothing, goes back to the alcove. GUS moves around the room, feeling half in, half out. He had been looking forward to a closed door and a few minutes of privacy. He looks out of the window. A game of Ring-a-levio is in noisy progress in the street. He puts down his hat and goes out. A moment later, he returns, carrying two more oddly shaped cases. Another trip, and he brings in three or four packages and props. He puts everything as nearly out of the way as possible. HELEN comes back in and continues her packing, grimly)

GUS. I hope this is okay. I mean— (*A pause*)

HELEN. (*Coldly*) Yeah, *what* do you mean?

GUS. I don't know. She—I don't want to put you out in any way—the lady said—she took my money, otherwise, I mean— (*He stops, lamely*)

HELEN. Don't break your heart about it.

GUS. Yuh. Well—I'll get out of your way—say a couple of hours or— (*He stops again, points to his luggage*) These in your way? (*HELEN regards the complicated pile*)

HELEN. What's in there, anyway? Some dead bodies?

GUS. My stuff—and my horns.

HELEN. Horns? (*A joyless smile*) What are you? The devil or something?

GUS. No, my horns. I'm a saxophone player.

HELEN. My God!

GUS. What's the trouble?

HELEN. Nothing—I just never saw one close to before.

GUS. Harmless.

HELEN. I can see. (*She packs some more*)

GUS. So I'll goof off.

HELEN. Okay.

GUS. Unless I can give you a hand in any way.

HELEN. (*Angrily*) I'll throw *myself* out you don't have to throw me out.

GUS. You've got me wrong, Miss.

HELEN. (*With proud emphasis*) Mrs.

GUS. Mrs.

HELEN. I'm going as fast as I can.

GUS. Jeez, it sure is easy to say the wrong thing. (*He picks up his hat*) Is there a good restaurant around here? Not too expensive?

HELEN. No.

GUS. Excuse me. (*She looks at him*)

HELEN. How long you been around, son?

GUS. (*A little smile*) Son? Around where—the city?

HELEN. Yeah.

GUS. Three and a half weeks. About.

HELEN. Old timer, huh?

GUS. I *been* living at the Hotel Dixie—that's Forty-third Street—or Forty-second—both, in fact. It goes all the way through down there.

HELEN. I know—it's very brave.

GUS. I had to move, though. I mean—I couldn't stand their tariff there. (*She looks at him*) Boy, they sure know how to charge! At least, I think so. Maybe it depends who you are.

HELEN. Who are *you*?

GUS. In what way?

HELEN. Besides being a saxophone player.

GUS. Well, Gus Hammer. That's my name.

HELEN. You come in by bus?

GUS. Yes. Why?

HELEN. Nothing. I just wanted to see if I could guess it right. (*She is having trouble with the top of her trunk*)

GUS. —use some beef there?

HELEN. What?

GUS. Close that?

HELEN. Oh. Yeah, I guess. (*He drops his hat and comes over to help her. They struggle with it for a time—finally get one side just fastened—but the remaining corner will not shut. They grunt away but no. Finally*) Wait a second, wait a—I know what's the— (*She opens lid, lifts the tray and brings forth a bulky object wrapped in grey flannel. As it comes out, the flannel slips off, revealing a large, ornate, silver cup, somewhat tarnished. HELEN re-wraps it, speedily, as she takes it out to the alcove. GUS replaces the lid and closes the trunk. HELEN comes back*) Three and a half weeks. Well well well.

GUS. (*Pointing to the trunk*) Closed now.

HELEN. Thanks. How do you like it?

GUS. New York City? Fine, I like it fine. (*She looks at him in mild astonishment*)

HELEN. You do?!

GUS. Well, not at first. I mean I was nervous at first about—you know, everybody telling me. But no, I'm surprised myself, to tell you the truth—but I like it.

HELEN. What's there to like?

GUS. New York City? Well, the whole thing. Idea. I mean, everything. The way.

HELEN. That's *nothing*, what you're saying. Name me one thing there is to like.

GUS. Well, I mean like—take the life—I mean—everybody in New York City seems to be *doing* something.

HELEN. Yeah, well, just wait till they start doing it to *you!* (*She is at the door*) These locks. I'm leaving 'em. You'll be using 'em, too. Don't worry.

GUS. That's quite a deal.

HELEN. But even *with* it, I been robbed would you believe it?

GUS. My gosh.

HELEN. I don't care, though. I figure anybody wants anything I got bad enough to jimmy six locks what the hell they're entitled. It was my privacy I was protecting more than my stuff.

GUS. Thanks.

HELEN. Then under here there's the ice box. I put that in.

GUS. Thanks.

HELEN. What do you mean thanks—I'm gonna sell it to you.

GUS. How much?

HELEN. Dollar and a half. There's a couple other things, too—that curtain and those three cushions and— (*The phone rings*) Oh, yeah—and the phone—I better settle that up with you, too. Get that, will you? (*Gus can't find the phone*) Under the doll! (*He finds it*)

GUS. (*On the phone*) Hello. . . . Who? . . . Hold on, please. . . . Any Princess Edith in here?

HELEN. Yeah, wait a second. (*She goes to the door and opens it*)

GUS. (*On the phone*) Wait a second. (*He puts it down*)

HELEN. (*Shouting up the stairs*) Edie!! Edie!! Bo! (*A faint voice, off*) Telephone! (*She leaves the door open, crosses to the phone. Without picking it up, she shouts into the mouth-piece*) Be right down!

GUS. That the house phone?

HELEN. No, no. Private. But I let a few of them give it. *You* don't have to.

GUS. Oh, sure. I don't mind.

HELEN. You better go to the company and get it transferred to *you*.

GUS. Well, I don't know—

HELEN. Don't you need it for your business and all like that?

GUS. (*Looking at the phone*) What are they gettin' for those now? (*Bo, a little bald man, comes running in, followed a*

moment later by EDIE. Both are in cotton bathrobes and slippers. They have the unmistakable masks of mimes. Ten thousand applications of grease paint have left a larger-than-life mark. They seem ready to go on—if only someone will point out the stage)

BO. (*As he crosses to the phone*) Excuse our appearance, ladies and gents. I didn't know you had company, I'd of worn my pants. (*Into the phone*) Hello! How'd we come out, Mike? . . . Oh. . . . Out, huh? . . . Who made it? . . . Yeah. . . . Yeah, good act. . . . Yeah. . . . No, just those two next week—no, one is a smoker and the other one a kiddie party . . . (*He laughs*)—be all right if we don't get our routines mixed, huh? . . . Who? . . . Yeah, what'd he have to say? . . . (*He is angry*) . . . Listen, he's got brains and so has a cat. . . . How the hell does *he* know so much? For all anybody knows the mind-reading turn may be the biggest thing they've had on the television yet! . . . Yeah, well how much would he have give for Charlie McCarthy and his dummy on the radio? . . . Who'd a thought *that*?

EDIE. Edgar Bergen, you mean.

BO. (*To EDIE*) What? (*On the phone*) Wait a second. (*To EDIE*) What?

EDIE. Nothing, not important.

BO. What?

EDIE. Charlie McCarthy's the *dummy's* name.

BO. What about it?

EDIE. Nothing, only *you* said—

BO. Look, Edie, do you mind to let me finish here with Mike?

(*On the phone*) Hello, Mike? . . . Nothing. Edie. She talks. . . . Well, don't forget us, Mike. I hate this walkin' around with empty pockets. . . . No, it's not that. It's just I'd feel so foolish in case I got held up! (*He laughs at his joke*) Yeah. . . . Goodbye, kid. (*He hangs up and turns to gus*) Sorry to have batten in.

HELEN. This is Edie and Bo Kerry—meet Gus Something.

GUS. Hammer.

BO. (*Offering his hand*) Pleased to meet you.

EDIE. Likewise.

HELEN. A new member.

BO. Oh? Nice.

EDIE. (*Looking at the cases*) Nice if he keeps his boxes closed. It's noisy enough around here without any new blowers.

GUS. No more than necessary, I assure you.

BO. What's the switch here? Who's moving what where?

GUS. Just temporary.

EDIE. (*Concerned*) Where you leavin' to, Helen?

HELEN. I'll tell you later.

EDIE. But when did—?

HELEN. *Later.*

BO. I wish somebody'd come and bail us out. (*He laughs*) Or we could get time off for good behavior! (*He laughs, then turns to gus*) Who you with?

GUS. Well, nobody steady, for the minute.

BO. If you been around you might of caught us—we're known as Princess Edith and Company. We been a standard for years. We used to go by Kerry and Cash. Catch on?

EDIE. He never saw us. He's too young.

GUS. Maybe I did.

BO. Don't say maybe—that's an insult—if you seen our act you remember it. Martin Beck himself he used to come in our dressing room and kid with us, watch us practice, everything.

EDIE. That was a long time ago.

BO. We're the ones first introduced the well known (*He goes into his number, an old English music hall favorite*)

"Let's all go around to Alice's 'ouse!

(*Drum effect*)

Vu-vu-vu-va!

Alice's 'ouse is like a palace is

Alice's 'ouse.

(*Trombone effect*)

Ta-da-da-da-da!

(*EDIE is trying to get him out, without success*)

There's knockers on the door

And knockers on the floor—"

(*To gus*)

This next line'll fracture you—

"You've never seen so many knockers

In all your life before.

(*He goes into a seesaw dance*)

Free and easy,

Bright and breezy,

Everyone comes to Alice's 'ouse is cheesy!"

(In a burst of final impatience, EDIE cuffs BO sharply on the back of the head and leaves. BO stops singing, looks after her, then moves to GUS) Pleasure to do business with you. (He goes)

HELEN. Used to be big shots, would you believe it? The funny thing they tell all kinds of fantastics—especially Bo—then, later you find out how it's true.

GUS. They looked okay.

HELEN. What hands me one is I look at them—they been there and back—and here's you—set on gettin' there. And all of you in the same place.

GUS. You got me wrong. I don't want to set any world on fire tomorrow morning—what the hell—I just want a job with a chance for advancement—take lessons—improve myself—try and get better and better. What's wrong with *my* name it can't be up over the Paramount?

HELEN. Search me. *(A silence. HELEN packs. In the stillness the pounding piano from below is heard playing a single four-bar phrase over and over and over again. It seems to stem from Harold Arlen's "The Devil and the Deep Blue Sea." GUS listens, and smiles in recognition)*

GUS. Ralph.

HELEN. Who?

GUS. That's my friend. How I got in here. *(He bangs a signal on the floor with his fist. RALPH echoes it in music)* He's an arranger? Yuh. That's a sock brass chorus he's doing right now for Woody Herman. He's good all right, Ralph. We're from the same home town—we didn't even know each other there—but here we meet. How's that?

HELEN. Where you from? (*No reply*) Don't you know?

GUS. Sure I know.

HELEN. Well—

GUS. Nothing. I was just told not to discuss it too much.

HELEN. What is it to hide?

GUS. Nothing. Nothing to hide. I was just advised, that's all.

HELEN. By your lawyer?

GUS. No. Different friends.

HELEN. What are *you*? A fugitive from a chain-gang? (*A pause*)

GUS. Minneapolis.

HELEN. Well, *that's* nothing to be ashamed of. I mean, no more than St. Paul.

GUS. (*Brightening*) You been up there?

HELEN. Not for long. I just passed through it on a tour.

GUS. Oh. (*Another pause*)

HELEN. Don't you want to know what kind of tour?

GUS. Yes, sure. (*A moment*) What kind of tour?

HELEN. Dancing contest winners. (*He is looking at her. HELEN snorts a little laugh*) I just wanted to see how surprised you'd show. That was the cup you saw before.

GUS. What's there to be surprised?

HELEN. (*A hoity-toity tone*) Oh, thank you, Sir Walter Raleigh.

GUS. (*Miffed*) What's all this?

HELEN. You think I never look at myself or what?

GUS. No.

HELEN. (*Sharply*) I know I lost my style. What the hell do I care? It never done me any good. Trouble, in fact. You want some good advice? I'll give it to you free. Never win a dancing contest.

GUS. Okay.

HELEN. Miss Rhumba, 1946. That's me.

GUS. That's interesting.

HELEN. Why?

GUS. I don't know. People you meet. You still in the same business?

HELEN. Only in a way. Tango Gardens.

GUS. I've heard of that, yuh.

HELEN. I'm off tonight. Summer's slow. Everybody's off. Three out of seven.

GUS. Slow for me, too.

HELEN. You ever been in Tampa?

GUS. Florida?

HELEN. Yes.

GUS. No, I don't think so. (*The phone rings. HELEN gets it this time*)

HELEN. *My home town.*

GUS. That where you're heading?

HELEN. (*On the phone*) Yes? . . . Who? . . . (*She is rigid*) You must have the wrong number—what? . . . yes, that's right—but there's no Peggy here . . . sure I'm sure . . . (*She hangs up, and in an effort to seem casual, her voice is little more than a whisper*) What were you saying?

GUS. Nothing. Just about Tampa.

HELEN. Oh, yes. (*Suddenly, she is in tears. She tries to get out of the room—out of this stranger's sight, can't make it—sinks to the trunk and sits there weeping. GUS is stunned—he waits. Then he goes to one of his bags—opens it, and gets out a bottle of whiskey. Seagram's, A Blend. He pours some into a glass and takes it to her*)

GUS. Here. (*She shakes her head*) You better have a shot. Come on. (*She shakes her head again. GUS downs the drink*)

HELEN. (*A soft wail*) No place, no place.

GUS. What?

HELEN. I'm packing—I don't know *what* I'm doing. No place! What am I packing?

GUS. Sure you have.

HELEN. Don't tell *me*!

GUS. Right here, lady. You can stay right the hell where you are. (*All this display of emotion has unnerved him and he is driven to anger*) I'll brain that old woman—what she trying to make out of me, anyhow?

HELEN. It's not you, fella. There's no use. If she don't pester me out today so she'll pester me out tomorrow.

GUS. What does she want?

HELEN. Same as everybody. More dough.

GUS. All right, then, look. It's an emergency. You pay her yours I'll pay her mine. We can both use the dump and this'll satisfy her, won't it? She'll be collecting double. What the hell more could she want?

HELEN. I don't think so. (*She gets up*) Thanks, but I don't think so.

GUS. Matter of a few days.

HELEN. Just the same.

GUS. Listen, it's nothing to me. I won't even know you're here. I got to be out and around anyway.

HELEN. (*Looking through the floor*) Your friend down there got an extra bunk?

GUS. Only it's used. That's why he got me this.

HELEN. Anyways, I'm broke.

GUS. Glad to lend you.

HELEN. Why? Why should you?

GUS. I don't know. People loaned me.

HELEN. Yeah, well. What's the use? She wouldn't go for it.

GUS. How do you know?

HELEN. She wouldn't.

GUS. Let me go talk—see what I can do.

HELEN. It's no use, I tell you. (*GUS starts out, she makes no*

move to prevent him. He leaves. HELEN, alone, takes a drink. The lights dim on the middle section and the walls return. Lights come up on MAC in his booth. He is sitting there now, with his three beers, the third one almost gone. In the background, the voice of Edith Piaf, singing her heart out. "La Vie en Rose." MAC surveys the audience, and makes a serious inquiry)

MAC. Anybody here interested in living to old age? Because if there is, I have found out a few things. I say this: if you want to live old—study the habits of the elderly and the aged. (*He pauses to let this sink in*) This is what *I* did before I became one. I used to go out to old folks' homes and study 'em. These ones who made it past eighty or ninety, even, some. And I learned a lot in this manner. Now you may think that is funny and yet I have been up to the Bronx Zoo on a Sunday and you couldn't get near to a cage for the crowd. Well, I don't deny this is an interesting and even you might say educational pastime—but it just does not compare with studying the human being, especially the elderly and the aged. (*He warms to his subject*) Now, what's the first thing you notice? Right! How they all take it easy all the time. How they are either resting, or about to rest or else they just rested. And everything they do, they do it slowly or on the slow side. Walk, or eat, or rock, or whatever. Now, I do not claim to read minds—like Edie or Bo—but I can feel what you are thinking. You are thinking, "that old fool up there he doesn't realize that naturally they move slow because they are old!" Well. I have considered that. And I have come to this conclusion, ladies and gentlemen. They don't move slow because they are old, ladies and gentlemen—they are old because they move slow. . . . Now, of course, I admit that this can be argued both ways—but I claim to have spent more time on this particular subject

than anybody here. And that is the conclusion to which I have come. That's all. (*The lighting effect takes us away from MAC and to SODA, leaning on her sill and in possession of a bottle of pop. It's green, this time. She talks to us*)

SODA. So? So we naturally made the deal. With *him* I made it, the horn blower—I wouldn't spit on her if she asked me. One thing I got to admit, God forgive me I should say good on her—that tramp—but I got to hand her, she is some fast worker. A guy walks in—one, two, three! They are partners, if you know what I mean. Of course he is no bargain, but who is she to be picky and choosy? Margaret Truman? (*She is sucking at the straw with parsimonious energy as the effect takes us away from her band back to the middle section, HELEN and GUS. The day bed is made up for the night now. GUS is in pajamas, robe and soled woolen socks. He rummages about in his suitcase, takes out a few articles and shoves it under the day bed. One of them is a picture of three people in a standup frame. He puts it on a little shelf near the bed. He opens a leather case, and examines the contents. HELEN is in a robe, too. She has been watching a Silex coffee maker. A tall glass, filled with ice, stands ready on the table. GUS looks down into the street, then turns back into the room and laughs*)

HELEN. What's funny?

GUS. Nothing.

HELEN. Something down there in the street?

GUS. No. Up in here.

HELEN. Like what?

GUS. Well, you were saying about New York—about not

friendly? Well a thing like this could never happen in Minneapolis. (*They look at each other for a moment*)

HELEN. It hasn't happened *here* yet. (*She turns her attention to the coffee pot*)

GUS. Anyways *I* never heard of it.

HELEN. That proves nothing.

GUS. No I guess not. (*He picks up his electric razor*) A.C. or D.C. in here?

HELEN. A.C. I think, isn't it?

GUS. I don't know.

HELEN. Why, what's the difference?

GUS. This here electric razor. I like to use it if it's A.C. in here.

HELEN. I think so.

GUS. Yeah. My father gave me that. Very nice of him.

HELEN. You said it. Considering when I left home, the second time that was, *my* old man gave me an A.C. kick in the slats. (*She pours coffee into the ice*) You want this? Here.

GUS. (*Coming over*) Thanks. This is great.

HELEN. You're the first person I ever met coffee doesn't keep them awake.

GUS. Makes me sleep, that's a fact.

HELEN. I don't understand it. Every damn magazine you read says. (*She prepares his bed. He drinks*)

GUS. This is great.

HELEN. Oh, sure, I'm full of talent. Remember me, Miss

Rhumba, 1946? (*She proves it with a skilful little demonstration*)

GUS. I sure do. Miss Rhumba from Tampa. (*He smiles, brightly*) Song title!

HELEN. At least I'm not ashamed of it. Tampa.

GUS. Why should you?

HELEN. You're ashamed of Milwaukee.

GUS. Minneapolis. No, I'm not.

HELEN. Sure you are. You were worried to tell it.

GUS. Well, that's a professional reason. See, in this business—I mean it's a question of style and so on.

HELEN. So.

GUS. Well, I understand the feeling is if you're from the Midwest or like that—you're corny. In fact, that's where the expression comes from.

HELEN. What expression?

GUS. Corny. Cornfed is what they mean. Shortened. A guy from the Midwest is supposed to be a hick—cornfed—you know—not up to date—not hep—so they call his style corny.

HELEN. Every day you learn something. Do you think you're corny?

GUS. (*Flashing*) I know damn well I'm not. Listen, I've heard some of these New Yorkers. Hell! They're out of tune, for God's sake! Then they steal a little Goodman riff or an old T. Dorsey, and they think they're *in* there.

HELEN. What are you hollering at *me* for?

GUS. Nothing. I'm not asking any favors, just a chance, that's all.

HELEN. You'll get it, you'll get it.

GUS. Damn right. Why should they be prejudiced?

HELEN. Who's they?

GUS. (*Startled*) I don't know. They. The same ones they've always been.

HELEN. Everybody's always worrying about "*they*." *They* oughta do this—why don't *they* have that? *They* think—*they* know—who's *they*?

GUS. I don't know. I never thought about it. No—it's just this friend I know—downstairs—he tells me not to mention Minneapolis. He says I should say I come from like Trenton or Flushing or like that.

HELEN. (*With mock understanding*) Oh, that's *not* corny.

GUS. That's what he tells me to say. Ralph. But hell, I played a club date with a pick-up combination last Saturday night—twelve men—stock arrangements. Over the River—I mean we went under in a train—Newark City?

HELEN. *Jersey City.*

GUS. That's it. Jersey City. Talk about corny. They were corny and they didn't know it—that's *worse* than corny. (HELEN brings a cigarette box nearer to his bunk. She looks in to see if it has any)

HELEN. Cigarettes in here—you're welcome.

GUS. Thanks—only I never use 'em. I used to. No more. Gave it up.

HELEN. You're some guy.

GUS. How do you mean?

HELEN. Unusual.

GUS. Everybody's unusual, haven't you ever noticed that?

(HELEN *lights a cigarette*)

HELEN. Since when don't you smoke?

GUS. Part of business. Better not to, breathing a horn.

HELEN. You drink?

GUS. Practically not.

HELEN. My goodness. (*A little pause*)

GUS. Yes to the next question.

HELEN. What? (*He smiles, surprised at the joke which has popped out of him. It rarely happens—he is shy but delighted*)

Oh. (*She is cleaning the table*) You were a nice kid till you got fresh.

GUS. Just a joke.

HELEN. Three and a half weeks in New York and you picked it up already.

GUS. What?

HELEN. *Flip* talk. (*She starts out. GUS intercepts her*)

GUS. I beg your pardon, Miss. Call it a slip of the tongue.

HELEN. Mrs.

GUS. Mrs.

HELEN. Okay.

GUS. Please.

HELEN. (*Nervously*) Okay, okay. I said okay, didn't I? What do you want?

GUS. (*He steps aside*) Nothing—I— (*She stands still, then speaks softer*)

HELEN. Okay. I don't know what's got me so high-horsey all of a sudden. I'm a little upset, that's all. Still and all—it's very nice of you to apologize.

GUS. I *do* apologize.

HELEN. Okay. Good night.

GUS. Good night. (*She moves into the alcove and draws the curtain. He looks at it for a moment, then goes to the day bed, takes off his robe, goes to the window—opens it. The sound of Ralph's piano and the trumpet practicer swell into the room. GUS stands facing the open window. He removes his pajama top and begins his deep breathing exercises—a slow breath in on ten counts as he raises his arms slowly above his head—hold for ten—out in ten. Then he empties his lungs in a series of sharp exhalations. The middle of his third trip is interrupted by a soft rapping on the door. He stops, turns and looks to it. Another rap. He starts for the door—HELEN comes out, quickly, putting on her robe. They almost collide. HELEN, startled by the state of his undress pops back into her alcove. GUS hustles into his robe. HELEN appears again and motions him to be quiet. He nods in understanding. She pantomimes—"They'll go away." He asks without words, "Who can it be?" She tries, "Someone for you?" He replies with a definite "No, out of the question." The knock again. This time it is harder and it continues steadily for a long stretch. HELEN and*

GUS *look at each other and agree to give up the game. He goes to the door and opens it*)

GUS. Yes? (TELEPHONE MAN, *in dress-up clothes, lurches into the room*)

TELEPHONE MAN. (*As he stumbles in, laughing at his own condition*) New York Telephone! Mechanical adjustment! (*He sees HELEN. She is horrified*) Right on time, baby. Never been late in my life. (*He has the giggles and they stay with him throughout the following scene. He sits down and removes a shoe*)

GUS. What is this? (TELEPHONE MAN *looks up and sees Gus. Shakes his head hard, looks again*)

TELEPHONE MAN. (*Sizing up what he thinks is the situation*) Oh, oh! (*He removes his hat, puts it over his face*) 'Scuse me deeply. 'Scuse me. (*Hat over face, he starts out quickly, and smashes into the wall. He comes back, sidles up and speaks behind his hand*) How long you figure to be, pal?

GUS. You're in the wrong place, mister. (*He begins to lead him out of the room*)

TELEPHONE MAN. (*As he stumbles backward*) Watch that pushin', Buster! (*To HELEN in alcove*) What time you want me back?

GUS. No, no.

HELEN. Get out!

TELEPHONE MAN. Don't 'No, no' me, Buster. I've had one or two but I know what side I'm buttered on, see—so don't butter me.

GUS. Why don't you be a good fellow now and—?

TELEPHONE MAN. (*Outraged*) I'm a good fellow now—what the hell! I'm just standin' in line quietly and waitin' my li'l ol' turn! (*Suiting the action to the word, he queues up behind GUS, who is standing by alcove. He removes his hat, politely, and waits. GUS turns quickly and tries again to lead the interloper out*)

GUS. It's a mistake.

TELEPHONE MAN. Listen, I know where I'm at—Bryant 9-8040—that's this place, so what the hell! (*He is trying to light a cigarette without success. He looks up with a silly leer*) I want my pound of flesh, know what I mean? (*This breaks him up*)

GUS. Okay, fella— (*He starts to propel him out once more. TELEPHONE MAN loses his temper. He flings cigarette and match to the floor*)

TELEPHONE MAN. I told you to watch that pushin'! (*GUS persists, TELEPHONE MAN lashes out and sends him reeling with a wild punch. GUS stumbles backward across the room, trips over a chair, knocks over a lamp, holding his mouth with one hand, breaking the fall with the other*) Didden I? (*TELEPHONE MAN is shaking the tension from his hand*) Didden I? (*HELEN comes out—goes to TELEPHONE MAN*)

HELEN. Beat it.

TELEPHONE MAN. (*Serious warning*) Now, look, cupcake.

HELEN. What do you want to be locked up?

TELEPHONE MAN. (*A yell*) You told me! Goddamit! Make a mistake, you said.

HELEN. (*Desperately*) Ssh! (*She puts her hand over his mouth*)

TELEPHONE MAN. (*Whispering*) You told me—din you tell me?—din I go all out for you?—Now what the hell! (*Gus is sitting on floor. He gives his head a few shakes. He starts to stand*)

HELEN. (*To TELEPHONE MAN*) C'mere a second. Don't make trouble.

TELEPHONE MAN. (*Aping her tone*) Not me, honey. No trouble. (*She leads him out into the hall and closes door. GUS stands up. His lip is bleeding. He goes to basin and dashes cold water on his face. A little time passes. HELEN comes back. She stands near the screen*)

HELEN. You all right?

GUS. (*Quietly*) Sure.

HELEN. You hurt?

GUS. No. (*A pause*)

HELEN. I could call a doctor. Or else I got a first aid kit.

GUS. I'm okay. (*They are both glad to have the screen between them*)

HELEN. I'm sorry.

GUS. What about?

HELEN. Everything.

GUS. Forget it. (*He comes out, walks to window, partly closes it*)

HELEN. Just one of those things. A mistake. (*GUS starts back, but stops. They look at each other, then he goes to the phone, turns it to read the number, looks close to make sure. Bryant 9-8040 is what he sees. He looks up at HELEN. They exchange a long cold look*)

GUS. Was it? (HELEN is about to speak, resigns with a shrug and goes into the alcove. GUS turns out all lights except the lamp near his bed. A strong light from the alcove filters into the room. A moment passes—HELEN comes out, a cigarette in her mouth. She takes a match from the table, lights her cigarette. Across the alley somewhere, a lonely trumpet is singing diminished seventh chords in slow triplets. The strains are modern and melancholy)

HELEN. Listen, don't be sore at me. It's my fault—but not all—what the hell—we all start out to be society ladies and president of a bank or the United States and we wind up saxophone players or like me. What the hell.

GUS. (*An impatient whisper*) Okay okay okay. (*She goes back. From the alcove smoke wafts into the room. RALPH's piano stops, leaving only the solitary trumpet. Then it, too, stops. All is still. GUS leans out of bed, takes a cigarette from HELEN's box, lights it, and sits up to smoke. He turns the lamp out. He is seen now only by the undulating light of his cigarette. The alcove lights go, too. In the night light, the smokes mingle*)

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

Curtain. There is SODA in her accustomed position. She is sipping from a bottle. Yellow.

SODA. It's a week and a half already—you think she's gone yet? What do *you* think? I'll give you three guesses and a genuine Western Electric Washomat. Like f-u-n. Furthermore, if I ever seen anybody getting no place fast, that's her. He's no greenhorn that guy—he comes from where the greenhorns come from, but he ain't *one*. He's got a mind on other things which are more important than anything *she's* got to offer. This is a fellow who is going to get there if not bust. So believe me—much as she wags her tail—he don't even see it because his eyes are full of notes. All kinds of notes. (*Her eye catches the parched tomato plant which stands on the sill beside her. She gives it a drink of soda water, then continues*) That Princess Edith without a job—she says to me yesterday on the stoop she says: (*She mimics archly*) I notice you found us another hornblower for God's sake. You must be queer for noise she says. So I ignore her. So then she gives again she says can't you find any normal tenants? I said to her: listen Missus—in the first place—mind your business which could use some minding—and in the third place, I said—if you have to know—musicians, especially saxophone, will always pay a better rate gladly so if you don't like it give me back your space and I'll do better with it with some musician who can't get in every place. So she closed her big water closet and that's all. I said to her—just be damn glad he ain't a trombone or drum, thank your lucky. . . . Everybody's got something to say. In New York anyway

a person learns to not hear. Automatic. If everybody listened to everything around in New York they would go crazy and some do.

(Lights now on the center section and the walls away. GUS is working on a chorus of "Japanese Sandman." He stands, facing the piano on which he has arranged a music rack. He is concentrated on the creation of sound patterns and oblivious to his surroundings. Then, an error. He stops—goes back six or seven bars and runs into the sticky place again. Better. He plays it again. Again. Again. Again. Now he goes on.

HELEN comes in wearing what she works in at Tango Gardens. As she does, SODA is withdrawn by fading light. GUS twists around at the sound of the door. He sees HELEN come in and sort of greets her with a nod—without interrupting his playing. She goes to the alcove and we see her change her shoes. She has brought home a bag of grapes, and during the following, washes them and puts them in a bowl on the table. GUS comes to the end of the chorus. He hits his lowest note, holds it, runs to the highest, holds it, slap-tongues his lowest once again and takes the mouthpiece from his lips. He unhooks the horn from his neckstrap, and places it on the stand before him. He caps the mouthpiece and works his fingers out of their cramp. He mops his face with a handkerchief)

GUS. Anything new with you?

HELEN. Not a thing.

GUS. How's it going up at the old Tango Gardens?

HELEN. Slow.

GUS. Could they use a hotter-than-a-trench-mortar alto man up there?

HELEN. Still nothing, huh?

GUS. Oh—call for you. Somebody like—could it be—Avis? She says you know the number.

HELEN. (*Quietly*) Okay. Not important.

GUS. Say, I don't want to get too— Still, lemme ask you. Is your name Peggy, too?

HELEN. No. Just a sort of a nickname.

GUS. Oh.

HELEN. Don't *you* ever say it though.

GUS. (*Smiling*) No. Mrs. Brown's good enough for me, Helen.
(*A little pause*)

HELEN. Anything new with *you*?

GUS. Well, maybe. You ever happen to hear of Frankie Jay and his Red Peppers?

HELEN. A band?

GUS. Yuh.

HELEN. No.

GUS. Me neither, but they're supposed to be very well known in bop.

HELEN. They must be.

GUS. I've got this audition set up with them. I think my full rack helped out. Wanted to know did I have a baritone-clarinet—flute—everything. They play a lot of trick stuff—so they can use different instrumentation, see? (*He looks at his stand*) I better doll these up before. Sometimes the looks of it. . .

HELEN. When is all this?

GUS. Tomorrow. Right here. He's bringing his sax section over. They don't want to do it where they work on account of the man they're replacing—so—

HELEN. Yeah. (*She looks around*) Maybe we ought to straighten up and clean around. (*Phone rings. HELEN picks it up and continues talking to Gus*) Better if you don't look too desperate circumstances.

GUS. Oh I don't think it—

HELEN. (*On phone*) Yeah? . . . Oh, hello Avis. . . . Uh-huh. (*GUS is untying the strings of a box he has brought out from under his bed*) Well, thanks, but I can't make it. . . . No . . . I'm sorry. So long. (*She hangs up*)

GUS. Mrs. Brown?

HELEN. (*Absently*) Yeah? (*A moment passes*) What?

GUS. You want to see something?

HELEN. Hell, no, I've seen enough. (*The trumpet-playing neighbor begins to see what he can do with a chorus of Gershwin's "Embraceable You." GUS takes out a huge, orange-colored fox pelt and displays it as though it were an infant*)

GUS. (*Triumphantly*) Look!

HELEN. What is it?

GUS. Fur.

HELEN. (*Looking at it*) How can you tell?

GUS. (*Bringing it over*) No kiddin', pure fur—look at this.

HELEN. (*Wiping the back of her neck*) You sure picked the right day for fur.

GUS. No, I'm going to keep it till December.

HELEN. If it lasts.

GUS. For my aunt's birthday. December tenth. I don't know if she ever had a fur piece.

HELEN. Or is ever gonna.

GUS. To tell you the truth it surprised me, too—but this was just dumb luck. (*He moves closer to her, drops his voice, and fondling the piece in his hands—tells*) I'm coming along the Avenue of the Americas there, about around Fortieth Street or like that and there's a little whistle—I mean like a man whistling—so I look around—and there's another few people look around naturally, but this fellow sitting in this delivery truck he calls *me* over. So I go and he asks me can I use a fox fur piece—well, I had to laugh. But then he tells me the spot. He and this other fellow, the driver?, they're on their way back to Saks Fifth Avenue where they work—and they notice there's a mistake and they been given this extra fur piece by mistake. Well, they talk it over and they decide to sell it because this other fellow the driver's kid is sick. And would you believe it—they tried for nearly an hour, the fellow told me, and no takers. He says there's so damn many rackets going around town that nobody believed this was on the level—he told me a fellow once stood around Broadway and Forty-second Street there and tried to sell ten-dollar bills for a dollar apiece and he couldn't sell *one*, because that's how people have become.

HELEN. He wouldn't be down there now, would he?

GUS. So then he showed it to me and I thought, Holy Smoke imagine if I could ever latch onto a thing like that for my aunt's birthday—but I said to this fellow—you got to pick somebody else because all I've got on me is about twenty dollars—so he and this other fellow—the driver?, they laughed and the first fellow said two *hundred* would be highway robbery. So I started off and the fellow looked at his watch and he said listen we got to move . . . take it for nothing—take it for the twenty—we don't care. So here it is. (*A long pause. The Trumpet Player starts work on the melodic verse*)

HELEN. (*There are tears in her eyes*) God damn this town and everybody in it! (*She gets up and moves away*)

GUS. Why? This no good?

HELEN. Listen, friend—one thing there ain't enough around of is truth—so have some: Two dollars it's worth if not less.

GUS. Pure fur?

HELEN. I bet in a hock shop the guy wouldn't give you four bits.

GUS. (*Low*) Well. *You* don't know everything.

HELEN. Not only not everything, boy, not *nothing*.

GUS. Then why throw cold water? (*He puts fur away, angrily*)

HELEN. You said my advice, didn't you?

GUS. Okay okay.

HELEN. Like everybody—they don't want advice they want you to tell 'em what they want to hear, that's all.

GUS. Thanks very much.

HELEN. What's it to me if— (A knock on the door. HELEN opens it. It is BO, wearing a remarkably effective toupee, and EDIE)

BO. Any calls? Messages? Money orders?

HELEN. (To GUS) Ask her!

BO. What?

HELEN. Go ahead, ask her!

EDIE. Ask me what?

GUS. Nothing.

HELEN. *Something*, not nothing. Go ahead, now—you think I'm against you go ahead. (GUS goes to box and gets out the fur again. He hands it to EDIE)

GUS. All right—your opinion—what's this worth? (EDIE examines the fur with great care. She takes it to the window for better light, blows on it, shakes it, strokes it, smells it)

EDIE. Worth zero. (As she hands it back to him she holds on to the tail a beat too long, with the result that it comes off in her hand. GUS dives for it, worried)

GUS. (Weakly) Not even something? (The trumpet stops)

EDIE. Why, it's like one of them things those guys use in the truck racket.

GUS. (Startled) What?

EDIE. Where they make out to be delivery guys with an extra bundle and grab off some sucker walking by? (GUS is putting the fur piece away, he glances up to see a triumphant HELEN moving into the alcove)

GUS. (*Stubbornly*) Yeah, well nobody around here's any expert, maybe.

BO. Listen, buddy, we use your phone don't give you any excuse to insult my wife. Besides you got paid!

GUS. I didn't insult anybody's—

BO. (*Interrupting sharply*) All right—just don't open up! My wife's owned more damn fur than you ever seen!

GUS. I didn't say she didn't.

BO. (*High*) —think we're some kinda poor relations or something? Relatives?

EDIE. Calm down.

BO. (*To Gus*) You ever make four seventy-five a week? What? Well *we did*—more weeks than you ever saw. Yeah. Four seventy-five and they brought it around, too.

EDIE. (*Loud*) All right!

BO. What?

EDIE. The old days, the old days—nothing but the old days. I got nerves in me, too, y'know, not just G-strings. (*She goes*)

BO. (*Indicating fur*) I'm sorry they caught you on that, chum.

GUS. Don't matter.

BO. Sure, that's the way to look at it and charge it off to experience. Listen—one thing this town is full of and that is crooks and deadbeats. (*Mysteriously*) Some with big names, too. I guess you heard about the swindle they got *me* on.

GUS. No.

BO. Well, I don't like to talk without the documentary evidence, you see? I'll bring it around some of these days and show you something curl your crew cut. (BO goes, closing the door. Outside, two fire engines pass, sirens at full blast. GUS spends a few moments of indecision—finally he goes to the alcove and knocks on the door jamb)

HELEN'S VOICE. Yeah?

GUS. Could you talk a minute? (HELEN steps out)

HELEN. Sure.

GUS. I'm sorry.

HELEN. What's there to be sorry?

GUS. If I'm crook'd I don't have to take it out on you.

HELEN. Ochay, chid.

GUS. I'll send it to my aunt anyway. I'll write her a letter with it and tell her it's no good but I'll send it.

HELEN. Why not?

GUS. After all, it's the spirit. (*The door opens and BO bounces in, carrying the "documentary evidence"*)

BO. Here's that stuff I was telling you.

GUS. Oh, yuh.

HELEN. This gonna take long?

BO. You rushin' me? I ain't started yet!

HELEN. I just asked.

BO. I don't have to tell it at all you don't want to. (*He is visibly hurt*)

GUS. No, go ahead. (HELEN goes back into alcove)

BO. Don't do me no favors, now.

GUS. (*Sitting*) Shoot.

BO. Well, see—speakin' of thieves crooks racketeers deadbeats grifters robbers short-changers swindlers highbinders and confidence men—you are looking at the boy in person who is about to show you the scars of the most royal drilling of all time. Just give me your undivided and you won't be sorry I promise it. (*He opens a grimy brown paper envelope and brings forth a collection of documents, letters, music sheets, copyright certificates and so on which have obviously been demonstrated many times*) All right, let's go. Now. I don't ask anybody to take my word—why the hell should they? I don't take theirs. Only what we're dealing with here is black and white and no mistake including if you're color blind it makes no difference. Okay. See this? (GUS looks) Okay. Now. You see here where's it's printed "music by:"?

GUS. (*Reading*) "Music by Paul G. Frye."

BO. Damn right. He's dead, Paul. My partner. Now over here—"lee-rics by:"—

GUS. (*Reading*) "Bowman Kerry."

BO. (*Wanting to hear it again, he cocks his ear*) What what?

GUS. "Lyrics by Bowman Kerry."

BO. You're damn well right! Bowman Kerry—*me!* That's who. Little Bo and nobody else.

GUS. Uh-huh.

BO. Now. Copyright certificate. Here. (*He hands it to GUS who looks at it*) Check me if I'm wrong. April 7, 1922. Right?

GUS. Yup.

BO. D913778174. Right?

GUS. Yes.

BO. (*Taking it back*) Okay. Now. (*He hands him a sheet of music*) All right—there's your copyright and there's your title. (*He watches GUS and is disappointed in the size of the reaction*)

GUS. Yes, I see.

BO. What the hell's the matter with you?

GUS. What?

BO. Can't you read?

GUS. Sure.

BO. Well all right then, read it. Read it *out*!

GUS. (*Reading*) "God Bless the U.S.A."

BO. (*Triumphant*) You're damn well right! (*He breaks into song, punching his palm sharply to convey the rhythm pattern. It's a jolly little tune—reminiscent of nothing in particular*)

"God bless the U.S.A.

And hear us shout hooray!

Oh, say can you see?

We belong to the land of the free."

(*He stops singing and addresses GUS, impressively*) Now what the hell do you say to that?

GUS. Yeah.

BO. (*Putting his papers away*) You ain't heard me make a

statement or a claim. (*Slyly*) Or mention any names, great or small. (*Magnanimously*) I don't accuse anybody of anything. I'm just talking a few facts. Take my motto. Watch your *self*! I just like to mention—if you put my bank account together with Mister Irving Berlin's, you'd have over four million dollars. (*He gathers up his things and goes—but not before he has hummed "God Bless America," shrugged knowingly, gestured graphically and conveyed his view of the situation in every possible way. He is gone. HELEN comes in. She has changed to blouse and slacks*)

HELEN. Another nut.

GUS. Sorry for the little guy.

HELEN. Sorry. Why don't he write another song since 1922?

GUS. I got my own troubles. (*He selects a record from a rack and puts it on the Libertyphone. He turns the volume low, then drops the needle somewhere along in the record with accuracy—he knows just where this Johnny Bothwell chorus is. It plays and he listens*)

HELEN. There's a girl I used to hang out with—she thinks she's on the track of something for me. A room.

GUS. (*Absently*) Good. (*The chorus ends, he puts the needle same place and plays it again*)

HELEN. You won't be sorry to get me out, is that it?

GUS. Who said anything?

HELEN. If I'm not welcome, my boy—

GUS. (*Laughing*) Holy jumping—! The way you're so touchy and cranky we could be married, for a fact.

HELEN. You should live so long . . . God! Two three weeks ago this girl Rose over at Tango she gets real sore—something, I don't know—I wore her shoes—something—anyway, she really blew and she hollers at me—I hope all your children are saxophone players . . . it was a joke but she meant it like a curse—you know what I mean?

GUS. Sure.

HELEN. I mean that's funny I should suddenly meet one, ain't it?

GUS. Anyways, it makes no difference to me. Don't worry you're in my way you're not.

HELEN. Ochay, chid.

GUS. You want some rice pudding? My aunt sent me this recipe, so I tried some out?

HELEN. How'd it come?

GUS. I don't know. I was hungry, so I ate some, and now I'm not hungry any more.

HELEN. Be the same if you ate a box of Rinso.

GUS. Anyway. You want some?

HELEN. Sure. What the hell, if they have to send the ambulance it can carry two the same as one. (*He gets her some rice pudding from the icebox and serves it*) You got plenty of talent, boy. Remind me to set you up in a hash house. (*The chorus ends. He plays it again*)

GUS. When your ship comes in?

HELEN. My ship's been and gone, sonny.

GUS. Don't say that.

HELEN. I don't mind. I had a good time while it lasted. (*She tastes the pudding*) Delicious. In a way. . . . What the hell. Most people go through life and just hear about it. I had a couple innings, so fine.

GUS. But what happened?

HELEN. Happened? Game called on account of rain. (*She hands back the plate. The trumpet begins again*) That was fine. Thanks.

GUS. Finish it.

HELEN. No thanks.

GUS. Sad, huh?

HELEN. It's not that. It's just I've got enough seating capacity.

GUS. I can't see it.

HELEN. I know you can't, because I'm sitting on it.

GUS. No, I didn't mean—I mean even when you're not, I can't see it.

HELEN. You never look.

GUS. How do you know? (*They are looking at each other. The chorus ends again. GUS takes the record off, and puts it away carefully*)

HELEN. I'm gonna get some air. That's what I'm really hungry for. (*GUS picks up his alto horn—dismantles mouthpiece from neck, neck from body, and plugs the main tube. HELEN goes into the alcove and changes her shoes*)

GUS. Say, you go by a drug store, I'd appreciate some witch hazel.

HELEN. Small, large, what?

GUS. Whatever's the cheapest.

HELEN. Small, I wouldn't be surprised.

GUS. (*Absently*) Yuh, I guess.

HELEN. You don't want to come along a minute? Get a breath?

GUS. I like to—but I better stick to this.

HELEN. You can't. It's twenty after.

GUS. —practice silent. If I don't want to blow this Red Peppers deal tomorrow I better woodshed all I can. (*He picks up the body of his decapitated horn and his fingers begin to fly from position to position. HELEN watches him with a kind of disgusted fascination*)

HELEN. You know you're beginning to *look* like a saxophone. (*She starts out*)

GUS. Funny thing. It's been in my mind.

HELEN. (*Stopping*) What thing?

GUS. Well, this set-up. You and me in here. I mean, you in there and *me* in here.

HELEN. What about it?

GUS. Nothing. Just I bet most people—they wouldn't believe it. (*A pause*)

HELEN. I don't believe it myself. (*She goes. GUS watches her, his fingers still moving on the horn. Slower, slower, now they*

stop. The light in the room fades and its walls enclose it, as lights come up on MAC)

MAC. For instance. Here's Gus, here's Helen. Two good kids—but what's their chance? Minus nothing. They don't get a chance to see each other right. See each other at all. She keeps looking backward, he's forever dreaming for later. So they don't meet at all. There's another piece of nature shot to hell.—Sad, too—because the way I see it—half the world is looking for the other half. You ever notice such a thing? Consider it. Buyers and sellers trying to meet up and vice versa. Crooks looking for suckers. Boys for girls and so forth. Tops for bottoms and bottoms for tops and it's interesting no end. Jobs looking for people, people for jobs. Or for trouble. (*The effect removes MAC, his time and place. Night becomes day, and as it does, the sound of a beautifully blended saxophone trio is heard, playing with a rhythm piano. It has been said that there is hardly a lovelier sound than this instrumentation and as we listen, this thought should occur. The trio is playing the saxophone chorus of Vincent Youmans' "Sometimes I'm Happy" as arranged for Goodman by Fletcher Henderson. It is rhythmic but moody. The walls go and we see the inside of HELEN's room again. It is, indeed, neater than ever before. There are four guests. Three are men dressed identically in maroon linen dinner jackets with scarf lapels—and maroon polka-dotted bop ties. The most important is FRANKIE JAY, leader of "The Red Peppers." He is a thin, dark, black-eyed dazzler whose face seems incomplete without its cigarette. His hair is long. He is playing the piano brilliantly, and kicking the instrument, too. Somehow he manages to provide some remarkably effective percussion. GUS is standing dressed in his best, haircut, hair slicked down—working over the third alto part on his stand. The other two men play from memory.*

CARL, *the tenor man, is bald, round and bleary-eyed. An obvious stupid.* TIP, *the first alto—is an All-American boy—blond. They play well, all three, listening for each other, blending. The fourth guest is CARL's girl. A red-headed gypsy type. She is silent and superior. She looks upon herself as a great beauty. She is not. They come to the end of the chorus, which finishes on an unresolved chord. They stop.* GUS *looks toward FRANKIE, anxiously. CARL and TIP are smoking in an instant)*

FRANKIE. (*Making the standard "o.k." circle with thumb and forefinger*) Lousy!

GUS. Yeah. Well, it takes time.

TIP. . . . takes more than time, man.

GUS. Oh, sure I realize that I just want—

TIP. (*Topping him*) . . . only took *time*, man. . . .

FRANKIE. (*Too sharply*) All right *all right!* What the hell is this? Some kind of Floogle Street debating society? Save your remarks. (*He rises and walks about*) Now I'll tell you *why* it's no good. It's three instruments that's why. Should be one. Shouldn't even be one. Should be a voice. (*He is full of gestures to make up for his inarticulateness*) Tongueing, phrasing, vibrato—everything. One. See? When I'm on the stool I'm playing eight, nine, ten notes at a time! (*He illustrates*) But one instrument.

CARL. Lopez speaking. (*From below, RALPH is heard at work*)

FRANKIE. I only ask you guys to play three notes at a time. Too hard? Take it from D. (*He sings*) Ra da ta da ta da da! Hup! (*They are off again, but not for long. After about ten bars, FRANKIE stamps his foot, signaling a halt, with a keyboard crash*) No no no no! (*They stop*) Same place. Gimme you,

Tip. (*TIP rips the phrase off brilliantly*) Carl. (*CARL the same*) Okay. You. (*GUS hits it. The inexperienced ear should detect no difference*) Trio. One! Two! (*They play again for a few seconds. FRANKIE looks up*) Okay! Kill it! (*He speaks to GUS*) Take off a little yourself, man. What do you want?

GUS. "Japanese Sandman"?

FRANKIE. In F. (*He begins a heavy stomp. To CARL and TIP*) Go! (*CARL and TIP begin to play a rhythm pattern—as they settle into it—FRANKIE points at GUS with his chin, cuing him in. GUS plays his heart out into the best chorus he can manage. As he plays, FRANKIE listens, his eyes, meanwhile, wandering about the room. Now he stops playing and goes to the window—opens it wide—and looks out—up and down the fire escape. He comes back into the room, leaving the window open. He goes to the main door, opens it—looks up and down the hall, comes back, sits down, and resumes at the piano. GUS finishes the chorus. CARL and TIP light cigarettes again. GUS waits*)

FRANKIE. (*Musing*) I don't know, man, I just don't know. Maybe you're up to us, maybe not. How are you on that baritone?

GUS. About the same.

FRANKIE. Clarinet?

GUS. Well—

FRANKIE. I get it.

GUS. Once I know the arrangements—

FRANKIE. Oh sure sure. What other instruments?

GUS. A little oboe. Not much.

FRANKIE. Got one?

GUS. No, but I could—on time.

FRANKIE. That's okay.

GUS. (*Bending down*) This little soprano—used to use it for novelties back home.

TIP. Who with? Spike Jones? (*He howls. CARL plays a saxophone laugh*)

FRANKIE. All right. Can it. (*To TIP*) Get out "Easy Living." (*TIP begins to rummage through a portfolio as FRANKIE begins to play "Easy Living" by Ralph Rainger. A tune he likes*)

TIP. (*Blotting his face*) You know something? It's plenty hot up here.

GUS. Sure is.

CARL. You got a bottle of beer?

GUS. I don't think so.

CARL. Okay, never mind.

GUS. I could get some.

CARL. Never mind.

TIP. Be nice, a cold bottle, Carl.

FRANKIE. Later.

GUS. Make you hotter, beer.

TIP. (*Highly offended*) What do you wanna be, man? In charge of my kidneys?

GUS. No, I just—

FRANKIE. How far is it? The beer place?

GUS. On the corner. Take a few minutes, that's all.

FRANKIE. Okay. If you want—we'll match for who goes. Odd man. (*He stops playing, takes a coin from his pocket. CARL and TIP do, too. Now GUS. They flip and compare*) Four head! Again! (*They flip and compare. All look at GUS*)

CARL. Out goes y-o-u.

FRANKIE. They got draft do you know?

GUS. No, I don't.

FRANKIE. Well, so long as you're going. Try for draft. You got a pail? (*He returns to the piano and the song*)

GUS. No. I'll get a pitcher from Rocco.

FRANKIE. Do that.

GUS. Anything else? Sandwich?

TIP. No, nothing.

CARL. (*To GUS*) Maybe a few pretzels, if they got the hard kind.

TIP. Pack of Camels for me, would you?

GUS. Sure.

FRANKIE. (*To TIP*) What the hell you think he is—some Western Union? Get your own!

TIP. What'd I—?

GUS. That's okay. No trouble.

FRANKIE. Guy takes advantage. You know what I mean?

GUS. (*Leaving*) Be right back.

FRANKIE. Don't break your neck, we got plenty of time.

GUS. Make yourself at home. (*He ducks out, is back in a second*) Can's down the hall here, in case.

FRANKIE. Got it. (*CARL begins a wild improvisation. GUS can't help stopping for a moment to appreciate it. Then he hurries out. FRANKIE and CARL play on—soon joined by TIP on GUS's baritone. CARL, while he plays, moves to the door, kicks it closed and crosses to look down into the street. Suddenly, he stops and takes charge*)

CARL. (*Snapping his fingers*) Let's go! Let's go! (*The three begin to pack. CARL gives TIP a needless shove*) Get the lead out, I'm tellin' you!

TIP. I'm goin' quick as— (*CARL slaps him sharply across the mouth*)

CARL. No talkin', I told you a dozen times—no talkin' when we're workin'. Action! (*Now they converge on GUS's rack. They begin to pack his instruments! The alto, the great baritone, two clarinets, the soprano sax—all melt away into cases. CARL is shoving them to the window*) All right. Gimme the letter, Frank. (*He snaps his fingers*)

FRANKIE. (*Startled*) Letter? What letter?

CARL. What letter? What the hell letter do you think, you goof-ball? The letter to leave, that's all.

FRANKIE. I ain't got no—

CARL. Holy jumping what a team!

FRANKIE. You didn't tell me—

CARL. It's a damn wonder we got what to eat.

FRANKIE. (*Frightened*) You didn't tell me what to write in it, Carl. (*To TIP*) Did you hear him, Tippy? (*TIP responds with a look of disgust*) I mean I'd of wrote it—

CARL. All right—shut up! (*He kicks FRANKIE in the leg with violence*) Talkin' talkin'! Write it out now. You want the sucker on our tail? You want to be looked for? That what you want? Hurry up! (*FRANKIE sits down, sullen and in pain. He gets out a fountain pen. CARL hands him a sheet of music. He turns it over and prepares to write. CARL and TIP and CARL's girl continue the packing and stacking near the window. CARL dictates*)

FRANKIE. Okay. (*He is rubbing his shin*) You have to blow your roof but?

CARL. Dear— (*To TIP*) What the hell's his name?

TIP. Gus, wasn't it? Something like that.

CARL. Yeah, Gus. "Dear Gus—Here is the dope. You lose and do not get hot—if you care to retain teeth, buddy."

FRANKIE. Yeah.

CARL. "This is really a good turn to you as as an alto man—"

FRANKIE. Two as's?

CARL. (*Thinks a moment, then mumbles*) "—as as an alto man—" (*He speaks up*) Sure two as's—what the hell's wrong with that?

FRANKIE. Okay.

CARL. "—as as an alto man, boy, you can't blow your nose. Also your personal appearance is strictly nowhere frankly."

FRANKIE. Yeah.

CARL. "Any trouble you make we will return you double. This is no— (*He searches for the word*) bull."

FRANKIE. Bull.

CARL. Yours truly, "The Red Peppers." (*FRANKIE is writing as fast as he can. TIP steps out the window—on to the fire escape. CARL begins handing the instruments out. When they are gone—he follows. His girl follows him. FRANKIE props up the note and goes along. He starts to leave—then remembers the soprano—rushes back, gets it and goes out the window. He reaches back in and takes the metronome from a shelf near window. The room is empty, ravaged and still. From across the court, a guitar is crying the blues like Charlie Christian used to. The doorknob is heard turning. The locks hold. A knock. Another knock. A moment passes*)

GUS'S VOICE. Hey! Door locked! (*A moment passes, the knob is rattled, then we hear the key in the lock. The door opens. GUS enters with a pitcher of beer and a brown paper bag. He stops as he realizes the room is deserted. He puts the things down, then starts as he sees his empty stand. He looks about in hopeless confusion. He reaches for the phone—puts it down—sees the note—reads it. He is on the verge of tears—but anger prevents them from coming. He rushes to the window, starts back, falls on his bed, sobbing suddenly and pounding his pillow. He sits up. All at once he retches—his insides are turning—his hands go to his middle—he moves to the basin behind the screen and leans over in an agony of nausea. He turns on the tap, sinks to the floor, his head seeking the coolness of the basin. The lights fade and the walls enclose. Lights warm on SODA sitting at her window*)

SODA. I told him I says it serves you right you stupid hick. The one thing not to trust is a stranger, let alone three strangers. I says to him now you do what they tell you to—in the letter—which is nothing naturally. So does he listen? What do you think? Of course no. Who am I? I'm just some nothing who's three times as many years in good health with a stuffed full large sized safety deposit box in the Drydock and four apartments so naturally this makes me out to be some nothing who don't know what time is it. So don't listen to me because what the hell could *I* know? So he can't wait to get with the cops and the detectives and he's got about as much chance getting back his trumpets as I got to get a call from the "Stop the Music." But I'll tell you what he *has* got a good chance of though and that's for a few broken bones in the Bellevue. Like they said in the letter. You got to know how to handle hoodlums. Like the time that one broke into my back bedroom? I didn't scream. I just looked at him and *he* screamed. *(Her light fades and the middle section re-appears. GUS is sitting and writing, surrounded by many. HELEN is there, sitting away from him. And EDIE and BO, drinking the pitcher of beer. And RALPH)*

RALPH. *(To BO)* Yeah, why? What makes you think so? So sure?

BO. Because they're small crooks, Ralph, that's why. Cornballs. It's the small crooks always get caught up with. *(To RALPH)* Hell, I was tellin' him only the other day—Thieves crooks racketeers deadbeats grifters robbers short-changers swindlers highbinders and confidence men. Look what they did to me. When I hit this town I had the most beautiful set of curls. Now not only I got no hair I *owe* hair.

GUS. This do it, you think? *(RALPH looks at it)*

RALPH. You don't know the serial number on the baritone?

GUS. Never did.

BO. What's the difference—they'll scratch it off. I would, wouldn't you?

GUS. Just for identification, the fellow said.

BO. Just for a little rubdown he shoulda said. What the hell are they gonna do with all the description? File it away.

EDIE. Look, it's bad enough don't make it worse.

BO. You're right.

RALPH. Coffee, Gus?

GUS. No, thanks.

RALPH. How do you feel, Pops?

GUS. Well, I'll tell you. (*A pause*) I just feel like throwing in the sponge, that's all. I'm out of gas.

HELEN. Don't say that.

GUS. Why? Why not?

HELEN. Anybody can do that.

GUS. Well, that's me. Anybody.

MAC. It happens, kiddie. A setback. I'm surprised you let it soak you!

GUS. Mr. McGreevy, I don't want to say this—especially in front of everybody—only you just don't know what the hell you are talking about nohow. Those guys just stepped in here and robbed my future, that's all. No little setback, like you say. My future!

MAC. Now now.

GUS. Sure they did! I went on the hook for those horns—fourteen hundred and sixty bucks to the Veterans' Administration. Paid back two hundred and forty—so I still owe twelve twenty however smart you want to figure.

EDIE. Things happen.

BO. It ain't life or death though.

GUS. Listen, to you people a horn is some kind of a toy maybe—I don't blame you—you figure what's so important about a saxophone?

MAC. Maybe we could everybody chip in.

GUS. No no.

MAC. Wait a second.

BO. Mac, face it. If you picked up this whole room by the heels and shook it, you'd be lucky if you came out with a dollar twenty. (*soda comes in*) Make that two-twenty—Mrs. Money just walked in. Hiya, Soda?

SODA. Save your remarks, Mr. Kerry. Or should I say Mr. Lay-off?

BO. That's it. Lay off. (*He laughs*)

SODA. Did you hear anything yet? From the station house?

GUS. Not a thing, no.

SODA. If I was you—I would watch your step. You don't know toughies like I. (*The phone rings*) There! I'll betcha they caught them already!

BO. How much?

GUS. (*On the phone*) Yuh? . . . Speaking . . . Yuh . . . Yuh. . . . (*A long listen*) Well, that sounds great but I'll have to pass it up. . . . No, it's not that, but I've run into some trouble about my horns. . . . No, I couldn't. . . . Till when? . . . Yuh, well that's nice of you but—piece of paper somebody? (*He gets it from RALPH*) Yuh, go ahead. (*He writes*) Bert Zeichner, yuh. . . . Endicott 2-4290. . . . Yuh. . . . Well, in case—but I doubt it. . . . Thanks, anyway. (*He hangs up, stands quietly for a moment—looking at the scrap of paper in his hand*) Anybody know a good alto man can leave tomorrow night—fifteen day Caribbean cruise—union scale plus expenses, white tux?

EDIE. Ain't it always the way?

GUS. (*Still standing still*) The regular man got the sudden mumps. Maybe it's just as well I'm getting out of the business—seems to be about the only way I ever get a job. I'm a stand-in for disease. Do great in an epidemic, okay.

BO. Don't talk so macrabby—you get me down.

EDIE. We oughta blow anyhow. (*She and BO rise*)

BO. See you, laddie. Sorry about everything.

GUS. Thanks for everything.

EDIE. For nothing.

BO. (*Gaily officious*) Well, keep in touch with me. I may have something for you. (*They leave*)

GUS. Well, I better get down there.

RALPH. (*Getting up*) Get my jacket—

GUS. Look, Ralph, you don't have to—

RALPH. Quiet. (*He goes*)

MAC. Nice boy, that Ralph.

GUS. The best. (*He begins to get himself ready for his trip to the police station. Washes, combs, brushes—clean shirt, neck-tie, etc.*)

MAC. Come on, Soda—play you some casino.

SODA. All I got to do.

MAC. Come on—I'll play you for big money—keep you laughing and let you win—now you can't do better than that! (*They start out*)

SODA. You jollying me around—what the hell you after?

MAC. Something unusual. (*They are gone. HELEN watches GUS—they are both ill at ease*)

GUS. Quite a crowd.

HELEN. Everything's everybody's business this day and age.

GUS. Well.

HELEN. Just use up air.

GUS. I don't know—a few friends—you can stand things easier.

HELEN. What good's backscratching?

GUS. Oh, damn!

HELEN. What?

GUS. Thing that bothers me is those guys were real musicians. Fine.

HELEN. (*A snort*) Fine. They were crumbs, cheap crumbs.

GUS. No, honest. I know. Take my word for something—I mean I'm just a square from anywhere. I guess I proved it.

Next thing you know I'll be buying the Lewisohn Stadium from somebody or a piece of Central Park. I don't know much—I admit that. But I know a little about a horn—and I want to tell you—that's what I feel the worst about. If they'd have been plain crooks or holdup guys—well, I've heard about gangsters and all that and you take your chances—but see, these fellows they're so good—why is it they had to do a thing like they done? To me?

HELEN. They made around a thousand dollars in around ten minutes. I don't know where they pay saxophone players that—even that Benny Goodman.

GUS. I guess not. Clarinet, he plays.

HELEN. Much easier to make your pile with some kind of a swindle than honest. No matter what the schoolbooks say. Another thing. You can't explain— (RALPH *appears*)

RALPH. Okay?

GUS. Yuh. (*He starts out*)

RALPH. Got the description?

GUS. Oh, no! Wait. (*He comes back into the room—gets the paper, folds it neatly into his pocket. He looks at HELEN, a long look*) So long.

HELEN. Yeah. (GUS and RALPH leave. HELEN looks after them a moment. Now she goes to the table, picks up the scrap which GUS left. She dials. Someone nearby is taking a cello lesson—master and pupil are heard studying Debussy. On the phone) Hello. Let me speak to Bert Zeichner, please. . . . Gus Hammer. . . . No, I'm calling for Gus Hammer. . . . (*She waits. Finally*) Mr. Zeichner? . . . I'm calling for Gus Hammer? . . . Hammer, you called him up a little while ago about the job?

. . . Yeah. . . . Well he wants to take it! . . . Yeah, he's gone to arrange about them right now so where do you want him to be and what time? . . . Go ahead. . . . (*She writes*) Yuh—Moore-McCormack, yuh—ask for you. . . . Fine. . . . Yes, absolutely definite. . . . Don't worry about it. . . . Mrs. Brown. . . . Helen Brown. . . . Okay. . . . (*She hangs up. As she slams down the phone lights come up on SODA. HELEN goes into the alcove and makes ready to leave*)

SODA. How do you like it? That old devil McGreevy making up to me. He'll have to get up early in the morning to get around Mrs. Yours Truly. Goo-goo eyes he gives me. I says to him, Listen, you probably ain't got one left in you and if you have it's the one that'll kill you so go drink your beer and relax yourself. You'll last longer. (*SODA leaves her window and comes downstairs to her roof. HELEN returns, ready to go. She dials the phone*)

HELEN. (*On the phone*) Avis? . . . This is Peggy. . . . Fine. . . . Listen, can I see you a few minutes very important? . . . I know. . . . Anyway, I appreciate it if I can see you. . . . Right away. . . . (*She hangs up and hurries out. SODA now sits on a little bench. Light from the skylight illuminates her*)

SODA. Still and all if it wasn't for the memory of my Luigi . . . God rest him comfortable. . . . (*Tears come to her eyes. She is genuinely moved*) I should have talked it over with Luigi—if I should marry another one in case he passed on before me which happened. But of course the subject never came up. (*Here she recovers*) He never brought it up and naturally if I'd of brought it up he'd of straightened my teeth—he was small, Luigi, but strapping. He probably wouldn't have cared if I went ahead with somebody else—after the decent interval. On the other hand, maybe he'd of been against it—otherwise,

why would he have made me bury him down here in the cellar? (*She sips away*) And he must of known how much trouble I would have, too. After all properly sealed to me means one thing and to the Board of Health another thing and to the Frank E. Campbell Company another thing. . . . Back and forth back and forth. . . . Poor Luigi . . . he must of got to feel like some commuter! Anybody else would have given it up, but I never went against him living and dead was the same to me. "If I go ahead of you"—he said to me that time—"put me in the cellar, cara mia. Don't put me in a cemetery with a lot of damn strangers. In Sicily, it wouldn't be so bad," he said. "At least I speak the language better—but in a strange land with strangers—put me in the cellar near you." (*Tears again and a choked throat but the bottle must be consumed in spite of all*) "And always two ton of coal on me." That's from when he was a kid—and never enough coal. He used to go picking it in the railroad yards in Sicily—and here, too—until we got on our two feet together. So that's why he said to me always put coal on me then I'll feel everything is okay if I just always got coal on. So there it is down there winter and summer, including fall. Right on him. I got a little headstone, too—it gets fresh flowers daily rain or shine—but on *him* there's coal, on Luigi—God rest his sexy soul! (*She glances downward in a new flood of memory and returns to her bottle, almost done now. She goes back to her rooms, as the lights fade on her. Dawn comes up on the center section, as the walls disappear. From the street, a solitary whistler and the sounds of milk delivery. GUS is sleeping on the day bed, fitfully. He rolls over with a sigh and digs deeper into unconsciousness. A moment passes. The key in the lock—then the door opens noiselessly. HELEN comes in carrying a small saxophone case, new, with price tag. She carries it quietly over to*

the rack, puts it down and goes out into the hall. GUS sits up suddenly, looks about, looks over toward the rack from one elbow—not comprehending. HELEN comes back, this time managing a large case (baritone sax inside) and a long, thin clarinet box. She puts these by the others and starts back to close the door—all at once she stops and stands still as she sees that GUS is watching her)

GUS. (*Quietly*) What's all this?

HELEN. Surprise.

GUS. I'll say. (*HELEN starts across the room*) Where you going?

HELEN. Close the door.

GUS. Oh. (*She closes the door. GUS picks up a little alarm clock from a chair near his bed*) This right? Five minutes to five?

HELEN. About. Yeah. (*He gets out of bed and crosses the room, wearing pajama bottoms only. He bends down and opens each case, lifting out each horn, examining it, then leaving it exposed. Meantime, HELEN removes her hat, and disposes of her accessories. GUS rises to face her*)

GUS. Some mistake here.

HELEN. I don't think so.

GUS. What then?

HELEN. No mistake. I called up that fellow about the cruise job—and you took it.

GUS. Yuh.

HELEN. I took the liberty.

GUS. Yuh.

HELEN. Well, you can't handle it without instruments.

GUS. Yuh.

HELEN. So there's your instruments.

GUS. These aren't mine.

HELEN. Sure they are.

GUS. I mean they're not my old ones.

HELEN. I know.

GUS. Where'd these come from?

HELEN. Place on 48th Street. Ralph helped me. We had to get a guy to open up.

GUS. How'd you pay for 'em?

HELEN. What's the difference?

GUS. A lot.

HELEN. With money.

GUS. Where'd you get that?

HELEN. You're like Baby Snooks with questions. Why don't you just say thanks and I'll say you're welcome and you can go to sleep. You got a big day tomorrow. Today, that is.

GUS. I'm no Baby Snooks.

HELEN. That was kidding.

GUS. Yuh. Well, this ain't. *(He is suddenly out of control—his actions preceding his thought by ten seconds. This is that dangerous time in a being's life when he goes out of sync. GUS picks up the alto saxophone and pitches it out of the window!)*

The open lower part is not large enough to accommodate its flight—it takes part of the upper window along with a crash. A few seconds later we hear it land. Now, in a rage, gus is on his way to the other horn—he picks it up, starts for the window—HELEN gets in his way and shoves him back into the room with violent power)

HELEN. What's the matter with—

GUS. Get away, I'm warning you, before I brain you with this!

HELEN. What are you—crazy?

GUS. No, not crazy but by God, you may drive me. (*They struggle for the horn*)

HELEN. What's the matter?

GUS. Matter? What the hell are you trying to make out of me?

HELEN. You must be dreaming a nightmare or a—wake up, willya?

GUS. Dreaming is right—I *am* up!

HELEN. Then what—

GUS. Listen, baby, I'm beat but I ain't *this* beat—to take *this* kind of— Holy—

HELEN. I loaned it—what's wrong with that? What do you think I did—for the love of—? Listen—we put a two-hundred-and-eighty down payment—I couldn't make—listen, thanks for the compliment but I don't deserve it—that's really a laugh. I just loaned it—what's there to fly off about?

GUS. Where?

HELEN. A friend I happen to know.

GUS. What's his name?

HELEN. A lady.

GUS. What's *her* name?

HELEN. Avis.

GUS. Avis what?

HELEN. Kroll. Avis Kroll.

GUS. Since when is your credit so great?

HELEN. What are you interested in me so for all of a sudden?

GUS. What about you in me?

HELEN. I don't give a nothing for you or anybody or anything—so what do you care? It was just a favor—you done me one so we're even!

GUS. Some favor!

HELEN. It was just a loan—you can pay it back and that's all!

GUS. When?

HELEN. Some day—any day. What do I care?

GUS. Well, you can just call it off.

HELEN. What are *you*? Scared of this town? You're yellow—grabbin' a chance to pull out—sure, then the rest of your life you got the consolation prize of if I'da stuck I'da made it—but they robbed me— You won't stand up to it— I've seen hundreds like you—in fact I see one every day when I see myself—

GUS. Finished? (*She starts out*)

HELEN. (*On her way*) No!

GUS. Wait a second. (*She disappears*) Listen! (*She comes back*)

HELEN. What?

GUS. Lemme have *my* say—we're just a couple of bump-ins—so let's not get too personal and as if— (*A gentle knock at the door. HELEN, nearer, opens it. MAC, in pajamas and robe walks in, lugging the saxophone, somewhat dented*)

MAC. Morning, Helen. (*To gus*) You happen to drop this? (*He hands it to gus, who takes it*) I figured you must have. Slid right off my little awning. It didn't wake me—because I wasn't sleeping. You'd be amazed how many people are finished sleeping by this hour. That eight hours a night stuff is the bunk. Just propaganda for the mattress makers. (*He goes. gus studies the horn*)

GUS. (*Softly*) It can be fixed up okay. Surprising.

HELEN. I wrote out the instructions and so forth. Right there. (*Gus sees the paper*)

GUS. Okay. Yeah, I saw that. I wondered what.

HELEN. So that's that.

GUS. The thing is, I'm desperate—that's the only reason.

HELEN. So okay.

GUS. But I'll never forgive you, Mrs. Brown. Never for what you're making me out. Stoop to.

HELEN. Three cheers for the red, white and blue! (*She goes. gus fingers the sax—puts the neck and mouthpiece on and begins a little test tune—"La Cucaracha"—a note in the upper register squeaks*)

GUS. Damn! (*He bends the key and tries the phrase again. A loud knocking on the pipes. GUS, startled, stops. He puts the saxophone down. The knocking on the pipes stops. Offstage, the sound of a window being raised and an angry voice [male]*)

VOICE. Hey you quit your banging on the bloody pipes this time of night before I belt you with your own bloody monkey wrench! (*Window slam. A pause*)

A FEMALE VOICE. . . . you know better than hollering in the middle of the—honestly—there's a small child sleeping—honestly! (*A pause. Then a baby, next in this metropolitan chain reaction, is awakened and sets up a screeching howl. GUS smiles out of the window at the waking world. Now the baby wakes the German police dog in the cellar of the house two doors away—and he decides to earn his watchdog's keep by barking the block down. The man yells again and continues. The woman adds her complaint. The sounds blend and mount to a deafening pitch. GUS shrugs, picks up his horn and plays again. We can hardly hear him. He can hardly hear himself. The baby is crying, the man and woman yelling. The dog is still raising hell and the neighbors*)

CURTAIN

ACT THREE

Curtain. MAC sits there, in his usual place, reading a large, colored postcard. He shows it.

MAC. This is from Gus. . . . We all got a postcard from him, except Helen, a letter. . . . In fact, she gets a letter from him daily and some days twice. . . . Nice letters they are, too, I understand from Soda. . . . She seems to know the contents. . . . I bet there's been more steam around her kitchen than a Turkish bath. (*The lights fade on MAC and come up on SODA*)

SODA. Naturally she's still hanging around. Us he sent post cards, her he sent letters so who knows? About fifteen sixteen different letters. What was in them I couldn't tell you. Personally, I am not interested. Live and let live that's my motto. Only I don't like to be taken advantage. So when he comes back if they want to stay in there together still, there will be an extra charge and if they ask me what's the extra charge for—I'll tell 'em! (*The lights fade on SODA as the center section comes alive. EDIE and HELEN are in the room, doing home permanents. The Toni Kits are spread out. At the moment EDIE is working on HELEN's head. The indefatigable trumpeter plays on and on. HELEN is reading a letter aloud*)

HELEN. "Well, that is about all the news if you can call it that. Well there is no sense in my going through all the apologizing again about my behavior before leaving. The more I seem to try to explain my behavior the less it comes out in the end what I mean. Well so all this part of it will have to wait until I get back on the 23rd and I only hope you will be there to

listen, because I sure shall be anxious to tell you quite a few things. Well, Bert just poked his head in and I guess it's time for the dinner session so will close with best regards or as they say down here buenos noches. Your true friend Gus Hammer. P.S. Ochay chid." (*She pauses. The ice crusher is outside preparing the evening's supply for Rocco's*)

EDIE. Air mail?

HELEN. I don't know. (*She examines the envelope—so does EDIE*)

EDIE. Sure air mail.

HELEN. What if it wasn't?

EDIE. If it wasn't, I would worry—but it is so you should worry.

HELEN. I don't know what's got into him or if he's kidding or what.

EDIE. He likes you—what's wrong with that?

HELEN. What's wrong is I don't like *him*. A guy like that you have to teach him all the steps. Be like working for Arthur Murray—I've done that, already, too.

EDIE. So far all the guy is asking you is to talk—so let him talk. What can it hurt?

HELEN. I didn't say no. Did *you* hear me?

EDIE. Nobody's perfect—you got to settle for less. You think Bo is perfect? He's a cluck—but there are times I'm damn glad to have him around, is the fact. (*She finishes a step in the waving proceedings and taps HELEN's head, gently. Automatically and without interrupting the flow of conversation, they change places and HELEN works on EDIE's head*)

HELEN. The only thing. How could it mean anything? It's an accident—it could have *not* happened in two seconds.

EDIE. But it did, that's the point.

HELEN. We're just a couple of bump-ins. (*The phone rings.*
HELEN *answers it.* EDIE *risks, crosses to a mirror and continues the work.* On the phone) Yeah? . . . Speaking. . . . Hello, Avis, I figured it was you. . . . What do you mean *how*—it looks to me like nobody has called me except you in about three weeks. And every time with the same pitch. . . . Yeah, well I'm getting sick of it, too. . . . (*Louder and stiffer*) Listen, Avis—I told you—as soon as the fellow comes back—you'll get paid. He got the dough, not me. . . . No. . . . No, I definitely will *not* check in! . . . That's right. . . . What do I care? Send him. I'll ignore him! . . . Don't think I'm scared of him or you neither. . . . I told you you're gonna get paid back so what more do you want? . . . I told you when—when the guy comes back. . . . I can't promise tomorrow! I can't promise anything. . . . Yeah, well the same to you and many of 'em! . . . Yeah. And you mine! (*She hangs up, angrily*) What she wants from my young life.

EDIE. You kill me.

HELEN. Yeah? In what way?

EDIE. You won't admit it you're stuck on the guy.

HELEN. What?

EDIE. I could prove it—even in a court of law I could prove it.

HELEN. They must put daffy juice in these Toni Kits.

EDIE. You think so.

HELEN. I don't care if he's living or what, or comes back or not.

EDIE. Just the same you're hoping a little. Since I've known you, for the first time I notice you hoping a little.

HELEN. I'm hoping you'll shut up already.

EDIE. You got so many friends you can afford to slap me around? (*She starts out*)

HELEN. Edie . . . (*Stopping her*)

EDIE. Don't admit it to *me*—just to *yourself*—that's all—all I'm asking you.

HELEN. Admit what?

EDIE. If you don't care about this fellow one way or another, like you say—then what did you go in hock for him for?

HELEN. That's because— (*She stops*)

EDIE. —and how come you got the nerve to hang up on that Avis at last?

HELEN. Because— (*Stops again*)

EDIE. I'll tell you. Because now it matters to you what you do. (*HELEN flops down on the bed, disconsolately*) You want to hear a saying? "Everybody needs somebody who can make them feel ashamed of themselves." My grandmother used to say it—only in Gaelic.

HELEN. I don't know. I don't know *what* I think—or feel—or want. Nothing.

EDIE. Relax.

HELEN. All I know is I'm in trouble—two hundred and eighty dollars worth.

EDIE. Maybe if you sent— (*BO comes in*)

BO. . . . any left in the box I'll have a little Toni wave myself. Hiya, girls?

EDIE. Bo. Do you know any way we could get two hundred and eighty dollars fast?

BO. Sure. But you wouldn't do it. (*He whistles and bounces his eyebrows*)

EDIE. Will you stop? Helen's got trouble.

BO. Oh. Sorry, Helen.

EDIE. (*A flash*) Say, could it be true that Mr. McGreevy's got that life insurance policy?

BO. There's one way to find out.

EDIE. How?

BO. Kill him!

EDIE. Go ask.

BO. Why me?

EDIE. Because I say. (*He goes*) Come on, twin, let's finish this. (*The lights go, faster than before, and the walls enclose the middle section. MAC is revealed*)

MAC. So I had to tell him the insurance was a gag. So he says—how about working on Soda? No use, I says, I've tried it before. If I weren't a married man I'd ask her myself, he says. What the hell's that got to do with it? Everything he says—that's all just everything. Next thing I know I'm spruced up, knocking on her door, and saying "Good evening." (*He is lost in darkness in an instant and replaced in our attention by SODA. She is on her roof, picking up straws*)

SODA. The minute he says "Good evening," I knew it was a touch. Don't ask me *how* I knew, I don't know, I just knew. He never asked me before, God knows. So that much I was prepared for. But when he came out with the remark, two hundred and eighty dollars, honestly, it was a good thing it wasn't a real hot night, because I would have fainted on the floor. As it was, I stood right up without knowing it—and I said to him—where did such a number come from—there's no sense to it. And he says, it's because I'm asking what I need. No more no less. . . . No less is more like it, I says. . . . Even the fifty I shouldn't have given him but he deserved that much for gall alone! . . . (*Blackout on SODA. Lights on MAC. He is studying a copy of a daily racing sheet. After a moment, he regards the envelope*)

MAC. Fifty lousy dollars. I must be losing my lousy grip! (*He studies the sheet again*) I never thought anything would make me touch a racing sheet again—so here I am. Shows you the good of making rules and regulations and resolutions. (*He begins to make a few notations, as the fading light takes him from view. The center comes alive again. HELEN, in a slip, is washing stockings. The room has been dressed up a bit. How, it is hard to see, but somehow it all seems cleaner and neater and brighter. Pillows have been turned—a picture straightened here and there. Dust removed, the window repaired, and so on. HELEN is whistling, "You Go To My Head." A sharp knock*)

HELEN. Yeah? (*No answer, but another knock*) Who is it? (*Another knock. She puts her foot against the door, and opens it a crack. As she does so, she is sent hurtling against the wall by the force of the door being violently thrown open. A man stumbles into the room, shoulder first. He regains his*

balance and closes the door, quickly. Then bolts it. He looks around to find HELEN, who stands near the wall, rubbing her arm. They look at one another, hotly. This is ARTIE BRAY)

ARTIE. (*Smiling and pointing*) No noise I warn you once and for all!

HELEN. Listen, Artie.

ARTIE. Don't give me no Artie. Bray to you. Mr. Bray, let's make it.

HELEN. Sure, why not?

ARTIE. I don't go for none of this familiar. I tell Avis—that's her trouble—familiar. Not only with the hustlers, with the customers also. It don't go. Take you.

HELEN. Yeah, what's the matter with *me*?

ARTIE. Nothing much—only you got one foot in the grave and the other one on a banana peel, that's all.

HELEN. Why?

ARTIE. Outa line, Kewpie, you're outa line. (*HELEN goes to him. She is in a panic for fear she may have been misrepresented. In her desperation she puts her hand on ARTIE's arm. As she does he looks at it*)

HELEN. Look, Mr. Bray. I don't know what Avis told you or anything but I promised her—

ARTIE. (*Quietly*) Take your hand away, Kewpie. (*She does. He smooths his sleeve*) Imported cashmere. Hates the human touch, my tailor says. Like mink, the same way.

HELEN. Avis knows that I can— (*He looks her over. She is suddenly aware of her undress. She starts out*)

ARTIE. Where you going to?

HELEN. (*Stopping*) My wrapper. Okay?

ARTIE. Never mind. I don't want you outa my sight a minute. You don't have to get bashful with me. Or make out. As far as I'm concerned that part of you ain't even around. So with me, this is strictly business right down the line.

HELEN. It's only money and I'll pay her back—I told her.

ARTIE. The money is nothing. The beef is you don't show when you say.

HELEN. I can't.

ARTIE. Go ahead.

HELEN. I changed my mind, that's the story.

ARTIE. So why'd you get into her for two-eighty, if that's the case, change your mind.

HELEN. I didn't know it then. I decided after.

ARTIE. What they call a coincidence.

HELEN. Sure.

ARTIE. You can change all you want only before there's a little square up.

HELEN. I told you. It'll be taken care of. I told her, too.

ARTIE. By who? By when?

HELEN. Very soon.

ARTIE. When's soon?

HELEN. When the fellow comes back I gave it to.

ARTIE. Don't cock and bull me, Kewpie. My eyes are too small.

HELEN. It's true just the same.

ARTIE. Okay. Gimme a date when.

HELEN. I can't. (*Impulsively*) Two weeks.

ARTIE. Two weeks! We could all be dead.

HELEN. That's right. So what's the difference?

ARTIE. It ain't neat. I like everything to be *neat*. Look at me, for instance. Ain't it the truth?

HELEN. Sure.

ARTIE. You got to see the other point of view. Like the radio says—three sides to every story. Yours, his and the truth. See what I mean? You're into Avis two hundred and eighty dollars. Avis's been level to you. She even offered to take you in she told me.

HELEN. That's right.

ARTIE. So where do you come off? You notice how I'm being fair? Also quiet?

HELEN. I appreciate it. (*He moves to her*)

ARTIE. (*In anger*) But it don't have to be like that! (*He throws her into a chair and gestures, his cigarette close to her face*) You either gonna pay up—or deliver. No monkeyin' around. Because if you don't, Kewpie, you're gonna have a hard time hustlin'—with one foot shorter than the other! (*A spasm of fear from HELEN*) Now I tell you what I'm gonna do with you. Why, I don't know—I must be getting soft-hearted or maybe I just got sympathy for a dumb brute—which is you. So I'm gonna give you forty-eight. It's been done for me at

times—only don't miss by then. (*By way of emphasis he reaches down with his cigarette and touches it to her arm. She jumps away with a cry. He goes. The center out. Lights on MAC, who is working over his racing sheet*)

MAC. They say there's them that makes a livin' bettin' horses. I don't see how they do it. . . . If you care to know how I'm doin'—gruesome. I ain't been near a winner yet and the fifty ain't a fifty any more. More like twenty. See, if you want to run up a roll you got to plunge and the condition of my heart does not permit me. There's some talk Gus may be turning up tomorrow. I hope to hell he does and takes over. All this hustle-bustle, excitement. It's against my principle. (*Lights on him fade, as they come up on SODA in her window, complete with bottle*)

SODA. So she suddenly announces she's moving, Helen. How do you like that for nerve? I says to her what do you want to move for? So she says she's going down there to Baltimore for a hostess job. Not a night spot. Just a regular restaurant. So I says to her, you're chumpy. Where are you going to find a lovely room like this in Baltimore? At these prices? Completely furnished—with all modern conveniences—including a fella. (*The lights fade on SODA as HELEN's room comes into play once more. GUS is there, unpacking. In addition to his luggage we have already seen there is a small basket trunk. Around the room we see a number of presents and souvenirs from the Caribbean. A gaucho hat, a doll, ashtrays and wall hangings. GUS is violently tanned. He has spent a month in the southern sun, and looks it. On the whole, his spirits are high. A record on the portable is slamming out a swing samba. It repeats when ended. HELEN comes in*)

GUS. (*Greeting her*) Hey!

HELEN. Hello. (*They look at each other for a long moment*)
You back?

GUS. I think so. Yeah.

HELEN. I'm still around I hope you don't mind. (*He takes the needle off the record. They look at one another in the stillness. The atmosphere is awkward rather than tense. Out on the street two cabs sideswipe with accompanying brakes and drivers' screeches*)

GUS. Helen—

HELEN. What's up? (*He takes a little box from his pocket and hands it to her*)

GUS. It's a present. Nothing much. More of a souvenir. (*She takes it*)

HELEN. Thanks. (*She unwraps it*)

GUS. They call it Aztec gold. It's nothing much. It's not even gold.

HELEN. Thanks.

GUS. What's all this about Baltimore?

HELEN. Nothing—just I'm going. (*She brings forth a bronze bracelet, puts it on*) Thank you.

GUS. Didn't you get any of my letters I wrote?

HELEN. Sure, why?

GUS. I don't know the way you sound I thought maybe you didn't get them—I'd have to start from scratch.

HELEN. Why, how'm I supposed to sound?

GUS. Well, did you read the letters?

HELEN. Sure.

GUS. What do you think?

HELEN. What about?

GUS. About the letters.

HELEN. Okay. Very nice. It sounded like a real interesting trip.

GUS. I didn't mean the trip part.

HELEN. What part?

GUS. I thought about you—one hell of a lot.

HELEN. What'd you want to do that for?

GUS. I consider you a friend.

HELEN. Thanks.

GUS. Maybe that sounds like nothing to you. Not to me.

HELEN. It's a lot.

GUS. Listen, Helen—I bet I never had a friend as much as you.

HELEN. Okay. You been nice to me, too. (*A pause*)

GUS. There's a development. This Zeichner. He's okay. And he may want me for this city job.

HELEN. Yeah?

GUS. It's a Chinese restaurant—three sessions and way under scale, but still—I mean they pay scale, but you got to kick back half—one of those.

HELEN. Yeah, well—until something better.

GUS. I sure have thought about you one hell of a lot. Did you?

HELEN. . . . I what?

GUS. Think about *me*, any?

HELEN. I guess so.

GUS. I've got quite a few ideas I want to talk over with you.

HELEN. What do I know about ideas?

GUS. These you will.

HELEN. Like what?

GUS. Well, like about the money I owe you.

HELEN. I was coming to that. We're in some trouble, Gus.

GUS. (*Delighted*) What?

HELEN. Trouble.

GUS. No, I mean what you called me.

HELEN. Gus?

GUS. Yuh.

HELEN. What's the matter? Your name, isn't it?

GUS. Sure, but you never called me it before.

HELEN. So?

GUS. It means something.

HELEN. I'm trying to tell you much more important. I don't want you to get hurt. Or me neither. (*Her sickness of fear is upon her again and tenseness is revealed in her voice*)

GUS. Just the same it means something.

HELEN. (*Barely getting it out*) The trouble is about the money.

GUS. Oh.

HELEN. We got to get it back fast. (*She is out of control and words come hard through her tears*)

GUS. (*Softly*) Wow!

HELEN. You know anybody? Or any way?

GUS. Not in a minute.

HELEN. How about your aunt? In a real pinch. Or your father?

GUS. I got to send *them* some.

HELEN. Usually. . . . Maybe if I see— (*She stops, thinks*)

GUS. Well, let's see tomorrow.

HELEN. I don't think so. Tomorrow's too long. (*She sits down*)
Get me some water, Gus, do you mind? (*He does so*)

GUS. What's the matter?

HELEN. Nothing, just I'm scared.

GUS. Don't be.

HELEN. You don't know.

GUS. Sure not. Not if you don't tell me. (*He hands her the glass. She sips it between phrases*)

HELEN. Well, the money. I loaned it from a party I used to be connected with her—it's a long story and what's the difference? Now all of a sudden she wants it back or else I got to make good. I can't talk about it.

GUS. Why not? I'm in it with you—I got the use after all.

HELEN. . . . isn't as if you asked me.

GUS. That don't cut any ice—this is something together.

HELEN. And right *now*—don't forget that.

GUS. Couldn't I talk to her and—?

HELEN. It's not just her—if it was just her I could take care of it—but there's this man. Artie Bray. You ever hear of him? He's been in the paper several times.

GUS. No, I never did.

HELEN. He's been around already.

GUS. (*Weakly*) Big guy?

HELEN. No, but don't start with him.

GUS. . . . just asked.

HELEN. The one thing he don't listen to is reason. In fact he listens to nothing. *That type.* (GUS goes to the phone and begins to dial)

GUS. Let me make a call here. (*He is waiting for a reply. The key turns in the lock—the door is kicked open and ARTIE comes in. He kicks the door shut with his heel. HELEN springs up with a cry—GUS, startled, hangs up*)

ARTIE. No noise, right? Now. Peggy Brown live here? (*He looks at HELEN*) Close your mouth, Kewpie, there's a draft. (*He smiles*) Where'd I get a key to you that what you want to know? Well, I'll tell you. I make it my business. I got a key to everything. Or can get. (GUS moves. ARTIE squints at him) Who you, Junior?

GUS. (*Matter of fact*) Gus Hammer.

ARTIE. Did I ask you what's your name? What do you take me for—some plain-clothes man? (*Loud*) I said who *are* you? (*The phone rings. gus looks at it uncertainly*)

HELEN. He's the fellow.

ARTIE. What *fellow*?

HELEN. The one I told you.

ARTIE. This the one he got all that scratch?

HELEN. Yes.

ARTIE. The whole three C-notes almost?

HELEN. Yes.

ARTIE. (*Looking him over*) Like to have a talk with you, hot-stuff. You must have some tricks!

GUS. Any time. (*The phone rings again. gus moves to it*)

ARTIE. Leave it alone. All right, now—so let's go. (*To HELEN*) What's the score, Kewpie?

HELEN. He's got a few ideas.

ARTIE. Ideas don't happen to be legal tender. Not in this State anyway. Have you got the bucks, that's what I'm trying to find out.

GUS. (*Quickly*) Some of it, yes.

ARTIE. How much is some? (*The phone rings*)

GUS. A hundred and something.

ARTIE. And *what*?

GUS. I'll have to look. (*The phone rings*)

ARTIE. Go ahead. (*GUS gets his wallet out of his rear trouser pocket and counts a few bills. He puts them together and holds them out*)

GUS. One twenty-two. (*ARTIE takes the bills and pockets them. The phone rings*)

ARTIE. I don't even count 'em. See how I trust you?

GUS. Okay.

ARTIE. Still and all, it's not even half. All it does so far is it keeps one of you from gettin' a cutting. Now. What about some more? (*The phone rings*)

GUS. . . . all I've got.

ARTIE. I wasn't talking to you.

HELEN. . . . promise you, Artie. But right now I can't.

ARTIE. Tough.

HELEN. You can't get blood out of a stone!

ARTIE. . . . get some out of you. You want to see me? (*Moving slowly and gracefully, he takes an eye-glass case from his breast pocket and changes glasses. The phone rings*) Just in case I have to go to work on you, I better have these. I got poor refraction, but with these I'm okay for any kind of close work. All I hope is I don't have to.

HELEN. (*Desperately*) Tomorrow morning.

ARTIE. I already give you two tomorrows. How many you think there are?

GUS. (*Unstrapping it*) Wrist watch. Bulova. (*ARTIE holds out his hand, GUS gives him watch, ARTIE pockets it*)

ARTIE. What about you, Kewpie? Get generous. Don't let Daddy do all the work. (*The phone rings*)

HELEN. I got nothing that's my trouble.

ARTIE. No jewelry?

HELEN. Sure, several. In the hock shop. 1108 Sixth Avenue. Go ask.

ARTIE. I know where to go.

HELEN. Wait a second! (*She goes to the corner shelf and takes down the silver cup*) You want a silver cup? Here. Real silver. (*ARTIE takes it. As he does so, he notices the bracelet, GUS' gift. He removes it from her arm*)

ARTIE. I thought you said no jewelry.

GUS. That's nothing, that.

ARTIE. Every nothing helps. (*GUS is rummaging under the cot. He brings forth a box*)

GUS. Fur piece here!

ARTIE. (*Examining it*) Behave yourself! I used to *sell* these. (*He throws it out of the window*) What else?

GUS. Electric razor? Libertyphone?

ARTIE. Sure. (*GUS gets them*)

HELEN. I think you're even. How about being fair?

ARTIE. (*Pointing to the instrument cases*) What's in all there?

HELEN. Nothing, a few horns.

ARTIE. All right. So swing 'em in.

HELEN. (*In a panic*) No—listen!

GUS. (*The last straw*) Wait a minute. The only thing—

ARTIE. What thing?

HELEN. They're not his! I mean they don't belong to him!

ARTIE. (*Smiling*) Sure not. They belong to *me*. (*He opens the door and speaks to someone who stands there—a crony*) In the car. All this nothing. (*The crony begins to load up*) If it wasn't for the middle summer they could take us for two Santy Clauses. (*The crony laughs at the boss' joke*) So that's all. You got off very lucky. Strictly business. (*To HELEN*) Call me up whenever, Kewpie. No hard feelings. (*He goes. Silence. GUS moves to the window and looks down into the street. HELEN resumes her packing*)

HELEN. Thanks, Gus. I hate to think if you hadn't of been here. (*There is a long, long pause. Suddenly, GUS comes to her and points out of the window, wildly*)

GUS. Best damn thing that ever could've happened!

HELEN. (*Regarding him oddly*) You'll be all right in the morning.

GUS. Listen, you realize what that guy just carried out?

HELEN. I was standing right here, remember?

GUS. You *don't* realize. That damn cup. Hell, you shoulda lost it long since.

HELEN. But the horns—

GUS. There's something more important to me than horns and my name up over the Paramount some day.

HELEN. We still owe on them just the same. The store called up, worried.

GUS. Okay. Let 'em. No sense all of us worrying.

HELEN. . . . nothing is better than something, that what you're selling? (*She moves again. GUS intercepts her. He is on the giddy side now*)

GUS. Nothing *now*—but the two of us.

HELEN. And not much of that.

GUS. It's all we need. So what's your hurry, Helen?

HELEN. I should of gone long ago.

GUS. It means something that you didn't.

HELEN. All right. It means something. That settle the argument?

GUS. I didn't have to come back here any more than you had to stay here—but I did and you did—that *means* something I tell you.

HELEN. So who do we call to find out what? Antoinette Donnelly in the Daily News?

GUS. And all the way back even though I hadn't heard from you—not even a word—I knew you'd still be here.

HELEN. You've made enough mistakes already without adding on me. I'm a jinx. I been jinxing you like I did myself.

GUS. Don't be so set, Helen. Listen to— (*There is an imperious knock at the door. HELEN goes to answer it. The Police Department enters, in the person of MARCUS B. KARP. He is a hard-working, dogged civil servant. He takes a sheaf of papers from his breast pocket and handles them importantly*)

KARP. Gus Henry in here?

GUS. Hammer.

KARP. What?

GUS. Gus Hammer.

KARP. (*Consulting his sheets*) No, Gus Henry.

GUS. Well, maybe. What's it about?

KARP. I'm Police Department.

GUS. (*Stepping back half a pace and throwing a worried look in the direction of HELEN*) Yeah? (*There is a pause*)

KARP. You the one had some music instruments robbed?

HELEN. That's right.

KARP. Gus Henry.

HELEN. (*Resigned*) Okay. Henry. (KARP goes to the door and shouts down)

KARP. Hey, Dave!

A VOICE OFF. Yo!

KARP. Rightupinhere! (GUS starts out of the room impulsively.

KARP stops him) C'mere, boy. You got a lot to sign.

GUS. Gladly. (*As he writes*) Sure never expected to see these old pals again. (*He is signing the forms in double triplicate.*

HELEN goes to the door. All at once a cry escapes her)

HELEN. Gus! (*She backs into the room as DAVE enters lugging a huge double bass violin. DAVE is dressed in the light green fatigue uniform with arm band of the New York Police rookie. GUS and HELEN stare at the mistake. DAVE leans the instrument against a wall*)

DAVE. (*To KARP*) This tag stay on or what?

KARP. What tag?

DAVE. Here. (*He indicates a tag which hangs from the neck of the instrument. KARP moves over to study it*)

HELEN. (*Softly*) Gus! Gus! (*GUS looks over at her in some confusion. He moves to her*) Gus, don't say anything.

GUS. (*Matching her tone*) Like what?

HELEN. Like about some mistake.

GUS. Listen, I can't. . . .

HELEN. Will you please for once. . . .

GUS. What's the use? I can't play a bull fiddle. (*A pause*)

HELEN. Couldn't you learn to?

KARP. (*Back at his papers now*) What do you say, boy?

GUS. Some tangle here, Mister. This is just the wrong thing.

KARP. (*Annoyed*) What the hell did you want to sign for it then?

GUS. Well, see, I didn't realize. . . .

KARP. Wait a *second*! (*With what he thinks is patience*) You have some music instruments robbed?

HELEN. That's right.

KARP. Wait a *second*! What date?

HELEN. August 11th.

KARP. (*Looking at his sheets*) That's right.

GUS. The only thing. . . .

KARP. Wait a second! (*From the beginning*) Your name Gus Henry?

GUS. Hammer.

KARP. What?

GUS. Gus Hammer.

KARP. That's your name?

GUS. Sure.

KARP. (*The great detective*) Then what the hell did you sign all these Gus Henry for?

GUS. Well, it was just you kept saying—

KARP. You strike me a little on the backward side, boy.

GUS. (*Bristling*) That so?

KARP. (*All mixed up*) Listen, why don't you use your head and let it stay like it is?

GUS. (*Pointing to the bass fiddle*) I just want— This is no good to me.

KARP. (*Bawling him out*) You just want to get everything more fouled up than it already is.

GUS. I don't see why—

KARP. (*Once and for all*) Don't give me any arguments! (*Waves DAVE out of room*) You got the thing, I got the receipt, that's all I know. If you don't like it, straighten it out downtown.

GUS. (*Giving up*) Okay, okay.

KARP. (*As he prepares to leave*) Where you from? Some out of town?

GUS. No, I'm a New Yorker.

KARP. Well you sure in hell don't act it! (*He leaves. GUS and HELEN stand looking at the bass fiddle between them*)

HELEN. I guess it's pretty old, huh?

GUS. Why?

HELEN. So big. (*GUS moves to the instrument and takes a playing position. He plucks at a string, ineffectually*)

GUS. I guess we could sell it all right or else trade.

HELEN. Or move in. (*She is packing her trunk again*)

GUS. Anyway, it's something.

HELEN. Nothing now but the three of us.

GUS. Hey!

HELEN. What?

GUS. That mean you're going to stick?

HELEN. No. But thanks for asking me to—Augustus.

GUS. But you said— (*He stops abruptly, then continues softly, spellbound*) Where'd you dig that Augustus?

HELEN. No place. I just said. I'm sorry.

GUS. It isn't that, but nobody ever called me that since my mother.

HELEN. Well don't get us confused, kid.

GUS. No, just it was funny hearing it that's all. . . . Helen . . . I think I love you.

HELEN. When will you know?

GUS. I *do* know. And listen—I mean for good—and everything. Together. Do you know what I'm sayin'? The *works*. (HELEN stands looking at him and reads the rest in his eyes)

HELEN. (*Haltingly*) You're a good kid only you don't know what you're talking about. (*He is standing close to her now*)

GUS. Helen, as long as we got thrown together—why don't we stay that way? *Try* anyway. Helen, I'd sure do my best for you—I believe in you—

HELEN. (*A whisper*) Why?

GUS. I don't know. You make me believe in myself—and besides—all I know is how I like to be with you and that's all. I *know* I love you, Helen. I don't think. I know. (*He touches her*)

HELEN. Don't be nice to me—will you please? Don't.

GUS. Why not?

HELEN. I'll take advantage.

GUS. Go ahead.

HELEN. Where can it lead to?

GUS. How do *I* know?

HELEN. See?

GUS. But *now*, Helen! Can't we live *some* now?

HELEN. I wouldn't want to get talked in. Everything bad ever happened to me was because I got talked in.

GUS. Okay.

HELEN. Only I have to tell you—I never thought I could— If there's anything left in me— (*She pauses. They look at one*

another, in love. gus moves his head to hers and touches her forehead with his cheek) Well, let's say we'll see.

GUS. I'll settle for that. (*He kisses her in a rare and gentle way*) God, Helen. I'm trembling.

HELEN. If we tremble together you won't notice it. (*They stand and look at one another again*) But listen—don't go away on any more cruises—not for awhile, anyhow. Till I paste myself together.

GUS. I wouldn't anyway.

HELEN. Why, no good?

GUS. No the band part was okay—and the trip too, but the mixing! *That* I didn't know about.

HELEN. Mixing?

GUS. Yeah. I don't remember him mentioning it—Bert. Do you? He claims he did.

HELEN. Not to me. (*A pause. gus goes to the basin for a drink of water*) What's mixing?

GUS. Well the staff is supposed to help balance up the shortage of men. Including the band. That's all.

HELEN. Oh. Did you?

GUS. Mix?

HELEN. Yuh.

GUS. Sure.

HELEN. Much?

GUS. I don't know what you'd call much.

HELEN. Did you mix many?

GUS. Not many—no.

HELEN. But some.

GUS. Yeah, that's about the size of it. Some.

HELEN. How many?

GUS. (*Thinks a moment*) Three.

HELEN. Three different?

GUS. (*Innocently*) What?

HELEN. (*Extra clearly*) Did you mix three different or did you mix the same one three times?

GUS. Three different.

HELEN. That settles it! That's the last time you go on that kind of a job.

GUS. (*Smiling*) I know what my job is now. (*A pause, then a whisper*)

HELEN. Ochay, chid. (*HELEN begins unpacking and GUS is helping her, as the walls close in slowly and take them from view. Lights come up on MAC as he comes into his position. He carries a sheaf of money in his right hand. On his chair there is a brown paper shopping bag which he now picks up, along with his other left-behind belongings. Lights, too, on SODA, in her accustomed place*)

MAC. (*Holding up the money*) Doin' a little better now. It's around eighty dollars. Up and down, up and down but still hoping. Whatever happens won't get *my* goat, though. Used to be a time I thought—money is the main thing. Wrong.

Breathing is the main thing. (*He reaches into the bag*) Say, look at this I happened to find. When it rains it pours. (*He brings forth the well known fur piece and displays it, proudly*) Gonna give it to Helen. (*He stuffs it back into the bag*)

SODA. My dentist says to me a day before yesterday he says you need two fillings in your cavities. You know what I said to him? . . . I said you go to hell! (*She returns to her pop bottle, confident and happy and boss. MAC, by now, is ready to leave. He tips his hat*)

MAC. Well. Been nice talking to you. (*He goes. SODA sips. That trumpet player is at it still, reaching, reaching and now and then falling. The sound of the city continues*)

CURTAIN

NOTE ON THE MUSIC

The various musical compositions used both on and offstage in this play are specifically mentioned by title in the stage directions. Nonprofessionals who intend to produce the play are required to use each composition listed. The following list of titles is hereby appended, together with the names and addresses of the copyright holder of each. The Dramatists Play Service is, unfortunately, unable to clear any of the music rights since the owners of the play are required to follow the procedure herein described.

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III

1. LA VIE EN ROSE *Harms, Inc.—Publisher*
1250 Sixth Ave., New York
2. YOU GO TO MY HEAD *Remick Music Co.—Pub.*
1250 Sixth Ave., New York
3. NARCISSUS *(See note above)*
4. ALICE'S 'OUSE (IS LIKE A PAL-
ACE, IS ALICE'S 'OUSE) *Bourne, Inc.—Pub.*
799 Seventh Ave., New York
5. THE DEVIL AND THE DEEP
BLUE SEA) *Mills Music, Inc.—Pub.*
1619 Broadway, New York
6. JAPANESE SANDMAN *Remick Music Co.—Pub.*
7. EMBRACEABLE YOU *New World Music Corp.—Pub.*
488 Madison Ave., New York
8. GOD BLESS AMERICA *Trustees of God Bless America*
Fund, Att.: Mr. Herbert Swope,
745 Fifth Ave., New York
9. I'LL REMEMBER APRIL
(Johnny Bothwell) *Leeds Music Corp.—Pub.*
1270 Sixth Ave., New York
10. SOMETIMES I'M HAPPY *Harms, Inc.—Pub.*
11. EASY LIVING *Famous Music Corp.—Pub.*
1619 Broadway, New York
12. LA CUCARACHA *(See note above)*

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